

Running Head: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF COMMON CORE

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

M. A. Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the School of Education

Biola University

La Mirada, California

USA

By

Albert Cheng

May 2012

Approved by:

Committee Chair:_____

Date:_____

First Reader:_____

Date:_____

Second Reader:_____

Date:_____

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

A Thesis

Presented to

The School of Education

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

By

Albert Cheng

May 2012

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Copyright © 2012 by Albert Cheng

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

ABSTRACT

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is the latest development in a long history of standards-based-reform in the United States. As of November 4, 2011, 46 states and the District of Columbia have adopted new curricular standards, called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These states and the District of Columbia are now implementing the CCSS and developing a new assessment system to measure student proficiency at those new standards. This study used a survey and interviews to gather teachers' perceptions of CCSS along with their perceptions about the forthcoming, associated assessment system. The sample consisted of teachers from three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school located throughout two neighboring school districts. Though teachers welcomed any improvement that the CCSS would bring to the status quo, they were still mostly apprehensive because they perceived that the CCSS would still retain many of the problems of current and past standards-based-reform efforts. Teachers ultimately exhibited a limited optimism and held modest expectations. Implications for how these perceptions of the CCSS will bear upon their outcome are discussed. Recommendations for how to proceed with education policy are also offered.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
List of Tables	vii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	3
Rationale for the Study	3
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	5
From <i>A Nation at Risk</i> to the CCSS.....	5
Why the Move from NCLB to the CCSS?.....	6
Educational Equity	6
The Same Educational Opportunities	7
The Same Performance Expectations	8
CCSSI's Response to Disparities Educational Opportunity	9
CCSSI's Response to Disparities in Performance Expectations.....	10
Moving Forward (and into the Classroom) with the CCSS.....	10
The Importance of Implementation	11
NCLB in the Classroom.....	13
The Narrowed Curriculum.....	13
Rushing to Cover Numerous Standards	14

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The Overemphasis on Testing	16
Third-Party Prescription of Curriculum.....	18
NCLB in the Classroom: A Summary	19
Conclusion and Implications for Implementing the CCSS.....	19
3. METHODS	22
Participants.....	23
NHUSD.....	24
FUSD	26
Data Collection, Instruments, and Analysis.....	28
Surveys.....	29
Interviews.....	29
Analysis of surveys and interviews.....	30
Validity and Reliability Issues	30
Validity	30
Reliability.....	32
4. RESULTS	34
Survey Results	34
Familiarity with CCSS.....	38
Overall Impressions of the CCSS and the Status Quo.....	38
Beliefs about the goals behind the CCSS	39
Questions about Teacher Professionalism and Morale.....	40
Results from Interviews and the Open-Ended Survey Question	41
The Quality of the Standards	42

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Concerns with Testing	45
Some Final Observations	49
5. DISCUSSION	51
Results and the First Research Question: Teacher Perceptions of the CCSS	51
Perceptions about the New Standards	51
Having Fewer Standards is Good	51
But Will There Truly be Fewer Standards?	52
Make Sure They Are Appropriate.....	53
Perceptions about a Common Core Assessment System.....	54
The Amount of Time and Resources that are Spent on Testing	55
The Ways Testing Narrows the Curriculum and Influences Teaching Practice.....	55
The Use of Test Scores to Make Invalid Judgments About Students and Teachers	56
The Big Picture: A Top-Down Effort Versus Wanting to do What is Best for the Kids	57
Summary of Teacher Perceptions of the CCSS: Limited Optimism and Modest Expectation	59
Results and the Second Research Question: How Teacher Perceptions of the CCSS Bear Upon Their Outcome	61
Low Teacher Morale	62
Some Causes of Low Morale	62
Why Morale Matters.....	63
Conclusions: Recommendations for Policy	64
The Need for Flexibility	64
The Need for Time	66
The Need for Preparation and Resources	68
Study Limitations.....	70
The Lack of Teacher Familiarity with the CCSS.....	70

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Generalizability Over Time	71
Generalizability to Other Populations.....	72
Suggestions for Future Research	73
REFERENCES	75
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS.....	83
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	85

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Years of Experience for Survey Participants	22
2. Grade Level or content Area Taught by Survey Participants	23
3. Description of the Interview Participants	24
4. Ethnic Composition of Students in NHUSD	25
5. Ethnic Composition of Students for Oliveira Elementary	27
6. General Results from the Survey	35

Chapter One: Introduction

On June 2, 2010, the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers released new national curricular standards in math and language arts for primary and secondary school. These standards are named the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). As of November 4, 2011, 45 states and the District of Columbia have decided to replace existing curricular standards with the CCSS. One additional state has adopted only the language arts standards (Gewertz, 2011). These states and the District of Columbia are now creating new common assessments, evaluations systems, and professional development programs to implement the new standards.

In his 2011 State of the Union address, President Obama (2011) praised these efforts to “raise standards for teaching and learning” as well as the federal Race to the Top program, which incentivized states to adopt the CCSS by offering a total of \$4.35 billion in federal grant money (para. 37). In March 2011, Obama also called Congress to pass a bill to overhaul the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the existing federal education law, before the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year (Cooper, 2011). Although the role of the CCSS in any new federal education law remained to be seen, the Obama administration published a blueprint for a new law, making known its desire to require states to establish college- and career-ready standards, such as the CCSS (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Eventually, no overhaul of NCLB occurred, so the Obama administration decided in December 2011 to grant waivers to relieve states from NCLB’s “most onerous provisions”; however, one of the many conditions for a state to receive a waiver was to adopt the CCSS or establish a new set of college- and career-ready standards (Dillon, 2011, para. 1). The federal government has also offered \$350

million to help the states to create the new assessment systems that will measure student proficiency at the CCSS (Rothman, 2011).

Background of the Problem

Major efforts by the state and federal governments to implement the CCSS have emerged as a crucial aspect of new education policies, and as when NCLB became law in 2001, any new large-scale policies will have large-scale effects. These effects – good, bad, intended or unintended – inherently impact teachers and their practice as they seek to comply with the policies.

Yet, this dynamic does not flow in merely one direction. That is to say, not only do policies act upon teachers, but teachers also act back upon policies and shape them. State- and federal-education policies are also modified as they are implemented in more localized settings such as schools and individual classrooms.

A growing body of research is focusing on this dynamic. Teachers undergo a complex process in which they try to make sense of a new policy and understand what it requires of them. Teachers then attempt to fit these policies into their preexisting, everyday school contexts, but in doing so, teachers also modify these policies. Thus, policies transform teaching practice, and teachers transform policies throughout the implementation process, ultimately affecting the capacity of new policy to successfully achieve its original goals (Coburn, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Honig, 2006; Orrill & Anthony, 2003; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Tyack & Cuban 1995).

With respect to this study, teachers form perceptions of the CCSS by drawing upon many years of standards-based reform efforts, not the least of which is the most recent NCLB law. In turn, teachers will make adjustments to their everyday practice in

order to comply with any new policy demands. In this way, teachers will shape the ultimate outcome of the CCSS.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is two-fold. It will begin by exploring teacher perceptions about the CCSS and, next, speculate on how those perceptions may impact the outcome of emerging policies within the new CCSS system. The two corresponding research questions for the study are as follows:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the CCSS?
2. How might these perceptions come to bear upon the outcome of the CCSS as the new standards are implemented? (i.e., how do these perceptions impact the potential of the CCSS to accomplish the original goals of those who developed the CCSS?)

The two research questions roughly correlate to the two-step process in which teachers first attempt to understand new policy, and then adapt it for their own respective school contexts. The first question focuses on understanding the degree of familiarity that teachers possess regarding the CCSS and seeks to obtain their feelings about them. The second question seeks to understand the significance behind teachers' perceptions so that inferences about the eventual outcome of the CCSS can be drawn from them.

Rationale for the Study

The CCSS have entered the forefront of the policy arena with a significant part to play in the future of the U.S. public-schools system. Researching teacher perceptions of CCSS is, therefore, warranted to enlighten policymakers of the effects of their legislation and to enable them to make better-informed decisions. This research will enable policymakers to address any adverse effects that emerge from their decisions and to

understand how to avoid those them in the future. Likewise, this research will enable policymakers to understand the reasons behind any positive effects of their decisions. Moreover, understanding teacher perceptions of the CCSS provides the information that is necessary to speculate upon its potential successes and failures. All this insight will be a constructive guide for moving forward with the CCSS and for crafting future policy.

But to move forward, it is important to be acquainted with the historical framework of standards-based reform. Much of what is occurring in today's policy arena is a result of what has happened in the policy arena of the past. As a popular adage goes, "The past is the key to the future." Constructing this framework and supplying relevant details is the focus of literature review in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Understanding teacher perceptions of the CCCS and how those perceptions bear upon the outcome of the CCSS requires familiarity with (a) the historical context out of which the CCSS have emerged and (b) the current policy context in which classroom teachers operate. What follows, then, in this literature review is a discussion about these two topics.

First is a brief account of the past 30 years of education reform. This account primarily focuses on the federal NCLB Act: the most recent, major reform prior to the CCSS. Indeed, the effort to develop the CCSS has emerged from what researchers and policymakers have observed about NCLB. Second is a summary of the research that documents the ways in which NCLB has shaped teaching practice since it became law ten years ago. These effects are now imprinted in the institutional memory of the education system and engraved into the consciousness of everyday teachers, carrying important implications for how teachers perceive the CCSS.

From *A Nation at Risk* to the CCSS

Rothman (2011) describes the CCSS as the “next chapter in American education” (p. iii). It is the latest development in an extensive history of education reform since 1983 when the US Department of Education released *A Nation at Risk*, a report that deplored the status of education in the United States. Historians explain that because the alarming report garnered widespread public attention, it catalyzed an assortment of efforts led by state and federal governments that focused on raising academic expectations and increasing the rigor of curricular standards. These efforts for education reform ultimately culminated in the passing of NCLB in 2001 (Vinovskis, 2009).

Despite the progress and changes during the past 30 years, research continues to document that first-year college students are unprepared for undergraduate work and need remediation (Aud et al., 2011). Likewise, employers consistently find high school graduates inadequately prepared for work (Eisen, Jasinowski, & Kleinert, 2005). With American students consistently lagging behind their foreign counterparts in academic achievement as measured by international tests scores, policymakers have perceived these facts as a threat to U.S competitiveness in the global economy (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Rothman, 2009). The resulting consensus among educational leaders and policymakers was that something must be done to improve primary and secondary education so that it would produce students who are ready for postsecondary education or employment upon high school graduation.

In response, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers gathered a consortium of curriculum experts, educators, researchers, and other educational leaders representing forty-nine states and U.S. territories to develop new curricular standards (Rothman, 2011). This effort began in June 2009 and came to be known as the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). About one year later in June 2010, the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers unveiled the end-product of the effort: the CCSS (Kendall, 2011).

Why the Move from NCLB to the CCSS?

Educational Equity. CCSSI, however, is not merely a response U.S. students' lack of college- or career-readiness and lackluster academic performance relative to foreign nations (i.e., economic reasons). Much of the impulse behind CCSSI is also in

direct response to NCLB for falling short of accomplishing one of its primary goals: educational equity.

In one of her many crucial works regarding education reform, Ravitch (1995) defines educational equity as the condition in which all students “encounter the same educational opportunities and the same performance expectations” (p. 27). Achieving educational equity has been a driving-force behind efforts of standards-based reform. Hess and Petrilli (2007) explain that NCLB, in particular, required states to establish their own (a) curricular standards math, language arts, and science and (b) criteria by which students would be evaluated to determine whether they are proficient at the standards or not. The former requirement aimed to provide access to the same high-quality curriculum for all students within the same state, (i.e., the same educational opportunities), whereas the latter requirement created a single metric by which each state would measure whether a student had adequately mastered the standards, (i.e., the same performance expectations).

The Same Educational Opportunities. However, research has found that these two NCLB provisions have been less than successful at realizing educational equity on a national scale. For example, giving states the prerogative to establish their own standards has resulted in a wide variation of curricular content. In a well-known quantitative study, Porter, Polikoff, and Smithson (2009) found “considerable variability [of content standards] from one state to the next” (p. 264). The differences in curricular content consequently yield differences in curricular quality. Secretary Duncan (as cited in kwinters, 2009) described the situation in a speech: “What we have had as a country, I’m convinced, is what we call a race to the bottom. We have 50 different standards, 50

different goal posts. And due to political pressure, those have been dumbed down” (para. 2). A Thomas Fordham Institute study corroborated Duncan’s remarks: It evaluated curricular standards in all 50 states, labeling two thirds of the states’ standards as, at best, mediocre. Of the remaining one third of states, only three possessed exemplary standards according to the institute’s criteria (Finn, Julian, & Petrilli, 2006). As a result, students who live in states with lower curricular standards are not receiving the same educational opportunities as those who live in states with more rigorous curricular standards.

The Same Performance Expectations. Likewise, studies have found that giving states the prerogative to establish their performance expectations, together with the pressure to increase the number of students deemed proficient at the standards, has driven states to lower those performance expectations. In addition to other statistical gimmicks, many states have reduced the minimum number of questions that students needed to correctly answer on state tests or have simply made those tests easier so that more students would score higher (Barton, 2009; Cronin, Dahlin, Adkins, & Kingsbury, 2007; McCluskey & Coulson, 2007). With these varying performance expectations, students who are not considered proficient in one state may still be considered proficient in another. Nor has it been clear if a student who is deemed proficient truly deserves that classification (Cronin, Dahlin, Xiang, & McCahon, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2011b).

Even the proficiency gains that states are making may be dubious. A U.S. Department of Education (2011b) report compared the proportion of students who are proficient according to state criteria with the proportion of students who are proficient according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) criteria. Because

the NAEP is a nationally representative assessment and uses its own criteria, it provides a common metric by which to evaluate all fifty states. The report concluded the following:

Changes in the proportion of students meeting states' standards for proficiency between 2007 and 2009 are not corroborated by the proportion of students meeting proficiency, as measured by NAEP, in at least half of the states in the comparison sample....The state assessment and NAEP reports show changes in percentages of students meeting the state's standard that are significantly different from each other. In most cases..., states' results show more positive changes than NAEP results (larger gains or smaller losses). (p. 3)

So, improvement in student achievement according to state criteria does not comport with improvement in student achievement according to the NAEP, a trustworthy, external measure. This inconsistency suggests that states may be exaggerating the progress that their students are making. The gains in the proportion of students who are becoming proficient at the standards may not be valid.

CCSSI's Response to Disparities Educational Opportunity. CCSSI has, in part, been a response to the disparities to educational opportunities and performance expectations. Supporters have argued that creating a single set of national standards would address the former issue by lessening the variation in curricular content across the United States. What students learn should not depend on where they "happen to live," they assert (Rothman, 2009, p. 2; see also Kendall, 2011; Ravitch, 2010).

Yet, having uniformity with mediocrity would not suffice because providing the same educational opportunities also entails access to high-quality curriculum.

Accordingly, CCSSI took two main steps to ensure high-quality standards. As Kendall

(2011) explains in his monograph about the CCSS, developers of the new standards first sought to identify the knowledge and skills that students would need to be prepared for beginning postsecondary education or a career upon high school graduation. The developers also examined the standards from high-performing nations so that the Common Core would be as good, if not better than those standards. Because of these two steps in its development, the Common Core has frequently been praised for being set according to “international benchmarks” and described as “college-and career-ready” (Location 60). Essentially, all students would have access to not only the same but also rich educational opportunities if a single, high-quality national curriculum was established.

CCSSI’s Response to Disparities in Performance Expectations. Meanwhile, tests to evaluate student mastery of the standards are being developed to address the disparities in performance expectations. Two state consortia, called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), are currently engaged in the effort to create common assessment systems (Kendall, 2011). Supporters of the Common Core movement suggest that the creation and the implementation of a single, national assessment system, rather than 50 different ones, would create a uniform set of expectations for all students and a more consistent, transparent metric to evaluate their progress in achieving them (Finn, Petrilli, & Winkler, 2009).

Moving Forward (and into the Classroom) with the CCSS. In summary, by requiring states to establish curricular standards and criteria to assess whether students are proficient at them, NCLB attempted to give all students access to the same

educational opportunities and to hold them to the same performance expectations, (i.e., NCLB attempted to realize educational equity). With NCLB falling short of its well-intentioned goals, CCSSI subsequently emerged as the next endeavor to accomplish what NCLB could not. Though the CCSS is hailed as a set of well-crafted, excellent curricular standards, the amount of progress towards attaining educational equity will depend on how teachers implement the new system in their everyday classrooms.

The Importance of Implementation

Implementation of policy is no trivial matter. A growing body of research is emphasizing the importance of understanding what happens to policy ideas when they are implemented (Coburn, 2004; Orrill & Anthony, 2003; Palmer & Rangel, 2011). This research suggests the following view:

[I]mplementability and success are still essential policy outcomes, but they are not inherent properties of particular policies. Rather implementability and success are the product of interactions between – policies, people, and places – the demands specific policies place on implementers, the participants in implementation and their starting beliefs, knowledge, and other orientations towards policy demands; and the places or context that help shape what people can and will do. (Honig, 2006, p. 2)

In short, a policy idea may not achieve its original goals, though it sounds good on paper. Whether a policy idea will be successful *in practice* greatly depends on what how it evolves within the particular context in which it is implemented.

Another way to describe this phenomenon is to say that implementation does not happen in a vacuum. In their popular book about the history of school reform,

distinguished professors of education, Tyack and Cuban (1995) assert, “Innovations never enter educational institutions with the previous slate wiped clean...For the most part, reforms have become assimilated to previous patterns of schooling” (p. 83).

Policies from the past and the present education milieu mold new policies in a dynamic process. Not only do “reforms change schools,” but “schools change reforms” (p. 60).

Classroom teachers, as people with agency, especially play a role in this process.

Darling Hammond (1990), a renowned professor of education, explains:

“[I]mplementation, a term frequently used as though it means straightforward compliance, is not so simple. All of the cases make clear that as teachers interpret the thin guidance they've received, they fill the gaps in their understanding of the policy with what is already familiar to them” (p. 342). Another education researcher argues that teachers do not “decouple” their everyday classroom practice from demands that the education institution places upon them; rather, teachers “actively mediate these [institutional] pressures in a process that is framed by their preexisting practices beliefs and practices, which, in turn, are rooted in past encounters with institutional pressures” (Coburn, 2004, p. 211-212). Teachers must frequently juggle, on one hand, what they believe to be best practice and, on the other, policy requirements that compete against those beliefs (Palmer & Rangel, 2011).

The point is that implementation is where the rubber of policy ideas meets the road of everyday school practice. Original intentions and ideas are transformed as schools execute them. In particular, past and present circumstances and experiences will shape how teachers respond to new policy. It is, therefore, critical not only to closely examine how teachers are impacted by the current NCLB law but also to ask how

teachers' perceptions of NCLB – “their starting beliefs, knowledge, and other orientations towards policy demands” – will shape their perceptions of the Common Core and, ultimately, whether the Common Core will achieve its original goals (Honig, 2006, p. 2).

NCLB in the Classroom

NCLB has been the subject of numerous studies, many of which have documented the law's effects on the teaching practice (Palmer & Rangel, 2011). These effects include (a) the narrowed curriculum, (b) a rush to cover numerous standards, (c) an overemphasis on testing, and (d) an increase in third-parties prescribing curriculum for teachers. Because these effects may bear upon teaching practice when the CCSS are implemented, what follows is a discussion of each of them.

The Narrowed Curriculum. Studies of NCLB's effects on curriculum have documented the phenomenon commonly known as the *narrowing of curriculum* (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Deniston & Gerrity, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2007; McCarthy, 2008; Mertler, 2011; Pederson, 2007; Pedulla et al., 2003; Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, & Orfield, 2004). This phenomenon refers to how NCLB requirements incentivize the emphasis of certain curricular content that appears on state tests while other content areas are marginalized. In particular, as Byrd-Blake et al. (2010) found in a survey of teachers in one high-poverty school district, schools spend most instructional time on tested subject areas (e.g., math, reading, and writing) at the expense of instructional time spent on non-tested subjects (e.g., art, social studies, and even science). Smith and Kovacs (2011) report the same findings in a survey of all K-8 teachers in a diverse school district of both high- and low-poverty schools. These findings are corroborated by a nationwide mix-

methods study conducted by McMurrer (2008), which included surveys completed by state department of education officials and a nationally-representative sample of school districts; qualitative interviews were also conducted in 43 school districts.

Teachers have supported the emphasis on teaching of math and language arts so that their students grasp skills and knowledge from those important content areas (Smith & Kovacs, 2011). However, teachers have also raised concerns that the curriculum has become too narrow: According to a RAND Corporation study, “activities that teachers believed kept students in school and engaged in learning were exactly those activities that schools cut due to time constraints from increased pressure to focus on subjects included in Adequate Yearly Progress [i.e., the measure by which schools are evaluated under NCLB]” (Hamilton et al., 2007, p. 97). Teachers, in other words, are not able to act upon what they believed to be most beneficial for their students. Instead, as evidenced by some studies, teachers within the NCLB environment have become frustrated with being unable to cover a more enriching, broader range of topics. Nor could they be as creative with their lessons (Darling-Hammond, 2010; McCarthy, 2008; Smith and Kovacs, 2011).

Rushing to Cover Numerous Standards. Though some content areas may be overlooked in favor of others, the number of standards within a content area that a teacher must cover can still be numerous and overwhelming (Kendall, 2011; Rothman, 2011). Teachers have reported their displeasure with rushing through the curriculum to cover all the material on the test (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008; Palmer, & Rangel, 2011; Ravitch, 2010; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). The expression “a mile wide and an inch deep”

has been coined and widely used to refer to the large number of topics that must be taught and the lack of in-depth coverage of those topics.

Much to the dissatisfaction of teachers, exploring a topic in greater depth and spending additional time to ensure mastery of a topic are lost in the rushed and cursory coverage of required standards. Teachers often “forgo teaching things not directly related to [the state tests]” or leave out “interesting concepts” and “fun stuff” (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010, p. 461). Often times, the curriculum is reduced to “focusing on lower-level skills of recall and recognition alone” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 70). Furthermore, needing to rush to cover all the standards causes teachers to adopt certain pedagogical methods, mostly direction instruction, simply so that they are able to cover content more quickly and not because they believe it to be most beneficial for their students’ learning (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2008).

Notably, the creators of the CCSS have attempted to rectify this problem by making the new standards more focused and shortening lists of existing standards. The president of Education Trust, Haycock (2010), writes that “words such as ‘fewer’ became a mantra for the entire effort” and that “participants were determined to avoid developing another mile-wide, inch-deep curriculum” (“Drafting the Standards,” para. 2). Recent analysis done by Porter, McMaken, Hwang and Yang (2011), however, suggests that the Common Core is less focused than some existing state standards. Still, others have criticized Porter et al. for not triangulating their findings with other procedures that may be used to analyze content standards (Wu, as cited in Hess, 2011). Whether teachers will still feel the pressure to rush through the curriculum under the CCSS and any resulting effects on teaching practice under the new standards remains to be seen.

The Overemphasis on Testing. Compounding the pressure to rush through the curriculum is the fact that teachers are pushed to use more of their effort and limited instructional time to prepare students solely for the state tests (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2007; McCarthy, 2008; Mertler, 2011; Pedulla et al., 2003). This emphasis on testing is usually seen in a negative light. Ravitch (2010) elaborates: “Test scores became an obsession. Many school districts invested heavily in test-preparation materials and activities. Test-taking skills and strategies took precedence over knowledge” (p. 107). Palmer and Rangel (2011) describe emphasis on test preparation as contrary to “authentic teaching” and competes with what teachers thought was “best for their students” (p. 623). Similarly, in Smith and Kovac’s (2011) survey, a large majority of teachers saw their effort of preparing students for testing as “reducing the quality of instruction they are able to provide students” (p. 210).

Other researchers have added that when teaching is reduced to test preparation, it focuses on “rote memorization” rather than “active learning” and is often “boring and tedious” (Deniston & Gerrity, 2011, p. 33). In a series of interviews with 16 teachers from a Texas school district, Palmer and Rangel (2011) found that their participants shared the same sentiments: “It’s draining. It’s boring. It’s frustrating. It takes all the fun out of actually learning something and enjoying it....It kills the learning buzz,” one teacher described (p. 632). In the end, the focus tends towards ensuring that a student passes a test, rather than what educators would consider student learning.

As Hamilton, Stecher, and Yuan (2008) note in their broad analysis of the history of standards-based reform, “When tests have high stakes, standards take a back seat....The tests rather than the standards tend to drive practice” (p. 44). Mertler (2011)

makes the same observation based on a survey of over 1500 teachers' perceptions of NCLB, arguing that state tests hold greater sway over teaching practice than the standards themselves. The impact of testing on teaching practice is not inconsequential: a fact that is acknowledged by developers of the CCSS. For this reason, writers of the Common Core assessment system are working to better align the tests with the curricular standards. With greater alignment, they hope that teachers would be able to focus on more genuine student learning than on simply helping students pass a test. Yet, whether such alignment is actually realized by Common Core assessment writers remains to be seen (Rothman, 2011).

To be fair, the focus on tests and standards has also yielded some positive effects. Hamilton et al. (2007), McMurrer (2006), Mertler (2011), and Pedulla et al. (2003) found that teachers were able to more effectively (a) diagnose student needs, (b) measure student progress, (c) detect content that a student has not grasped, (d) find weaknesses in the curriculum or their own instruction, and (e) align what students needed to learn with what they taught. A study by the National Staff Development Council (as cited in Mertler, 2011) indicated that testing and standards initiated dialogue and action among teachers aimed to raise student achievement.

Yet despite the extensive efforts of test preparation, some students still did not perform well. One teacher's remark captures the resulting frustration, "We did test prep and still it wasn't enough for our students to do well on the test" (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, p. 531). Pressure to raise test scores and to meet predetermined targets in achievement has placed stress upon many teachers (McCarthy, 2008; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Smith and Kovacs, 2011). Palmer and Rangel (2011) and McCarthy (2008)

additionally note that teacher morale is lowered as they watch their students become exhausted by too much testing while missing the enjoyment of learning.

Teachers also recognize that the test score does not account all factors that should be taken into consideration when determining how successful a student is. For instance, a single test score cannot capture the growth that a student made over the course of the school year (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Hamilton et al., 2007; McCarthy, 2008; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Based on over 200 interviews with teachers over a five-year period, Crocco and Costigan (2009) report that teachers “disavowed the significance of the tests as meaningful indicators of their students’ progress” and believed that what they observe about their students in the classroom is a more valid indicator (p. 523).

Third-Party Prescription of Curriculum. Numerous studies about NCLB further report that administrators frequently prescribe certain curricular methods, grade-level exams, or textbooks that teachers must use. Even teachers with administrators who do not explicitly tell them how to teach are prone to pressures that nudge them to adopt certain instructional methods so that students would be better prepared for state tests. Hamilton et al. (2008) observe that the “confluence of professional development, curriculum materials, assessments, data systems, and other resources is likely to influence not only what is taught but how it is taught” (p. 50). Many of these decisions are driven by the need to produce adequate test scores instead of what would best serve the students’ needs (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2008; McCarthy, 2008; Smith & Kovacs, 2011; Valli & Buese, 2007). Such micromanagement, especially when scripted lessons are required, creates a “tension-filled school environment” because teacher views

on “good teaching often deviated from administrators’ expectations” (Crocco & Costigan 2007, p. 523).

NCLB in the Classroom: A Summary. The narrowed curriculum, rushing to cover the standards, the focus on test-preparation, and the third-party prescription of curriculum constrains teachers from being able to do what they think would best serve their students (Deniston & Gerrity, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2007; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Valli & Buese, 2007). The end result of these NCLB side-effects relegates teachers to use an approach to their practice that is disconnected from, or even contrary to, their respective educational philosophies and beliefs. This disconnect undermines teacher morale, as teachers feel less trusted and respected while feeling increasingly directed and forced to comply with institutional and bureaucratic demands (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2007). More important, teachers are key players in implementing policy; so low teacher morale poses a grave threat to effective implementation of policy and undermines the potential success of any policy (Center on Education Policy, 2006). The institutional pressures of NCLB have not merely conditioned teachers’ behaviors but etched certain dispositions into their character. The question at hand is the following: How will the positive and negative ways in which NCLB has shaped teachers affect teaching practice under the CCSS and the outcome of any new policies when the CCSS are fully implemented?

Conclusion and Implications for Implementing the CCSS

The emergence of the CCSS is the next significant event in a long history of well-intentioned, national-scale education reforms. Like its predecessors, it is aimed at realizing educational equity: the condition in which all students receive the same high-

quality educational opportunities and are held to the same performance expectations. What is unprecedented, however, is that for the first time in its history, the United States will have national curricular standards and assessments. The progress that is made towards attaining educational equity remains to be seen, yet supporters are optimistic: Rothman (2011) calls the “promise” of the CCSS “too great to let it slip through our fingers (p. 178). Kendall (2011) shares the same confidence, declaring that CCSSI has “shown a readiness to seize on what is best about standards-based education and at the same time offers hope that the lesson we’ve learned [from previous standards-based-reform efforts] won’t need to be learned again” (Location 824).

However, Darling-Hammond (1990) cautions: “If school reform via state-level policy is to prove constructive for education, research on its school- and classroom-level effects will be vital” (p. 341). The reason for this admonishment is that the particular, localized contexts in which a policy is implemented will shape and alter that policy. Darling-Hammond later explains:

The way in which teachers and other school people encounter and interpret policy is not just a function of how a particular policy is transmitted to them. It is also a function of the educational context within which the policy lands after it careens down the state school hierarchy. (p. 343)

Initial intentions and ideas are malleable; actions in classrooms do not necessarily comport with the original policy aims from statehouses. So, whether the developers of the CCSS will succeed or fail to achieve their original goals will depend on how teachers respond to the new standards in their day-to-day practice.

Furthermore, the way in which teachers will respond to the CCSS is based upon their existing “beliefs, knowledge, and other orientations,” which is, at the moment, primarily influenced by ten years of operating under NCLB. Thus, essential to understanding how teachers perceive the CCSS is exploring them through lens of how teachers perceive and have been shaped by NCLB. Then, progress can be made towards understanding how teacher perceptions of the CCSS will bear upon its success or failure when implemented.

Finally, the intent of conducting this study is not only to contribute to the latest body of research about the forthcoming CCSS but also to add to the growing body of research on implementation of policy as the United States moves into a new era of American education. In chapter three, I, the researcher, reveal the methodological approaches that I employed to accomplish such ends.

Chapter 3: Methods

As discussed in chapter two, NCLB was a well-intentioned law and has accomplished some good for students and the school system at large. However, NCLB also fell short of realizing all of its goals and resulted in several unfavorable, unintended consequences, particularly as it was implemented at the classroom level. Now, with over 40 U.S. states adopting new national curricular standards (i.e., the CCSS), the school system is on verge of another major change.

Like their predecessors who crafted NCLB, the developers of the CCSS have good intentions behind their effort, such as promoting educational equity. And like NCLB, whether the Common Core movement will realize its goals is contingent upon what happens when the CCSS are implemented in everyday classrooms. Yet, research suggests that how teachers implement a policy is influenced by their perceptions of that policy (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Honig, 2006). It is, therefore, important to explore teachers' current perceptions of the CCSS and to ask how those perceptions will bear upon the implementation of the CCSS. There is little, if any, research that investigates these questions because implementation of the new standards is in its nascent stages. This study serves to begin filling that gap in research.

Table 1
Years of Experience for Survey Participants

Years of Teaching Experience	0 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 14	15 to 19	20 to 24	25 to 29	30 or more
Frequency (Number of Teachers)	6	21	14	13	17	17	7

This mix-methods study began with a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase. I first gathered quantitative data by surveying a sample of teachers from the New Haven Unified School District (NHUSD) and the neighboring Fremont

Unified School District (FUSD). In the second phase of the study, I conducted personal interviews to qualify and to further investigate the quantitative data that was collected from the survey.

Participants

I gathered the input of teachers from one high school, two middle schools, and three elementary schools. Out of the 333 teachers who received an invitation to respond to the survey, 95 did so. Just over half of the teachers in the sample have 15 or more years of experience, as shown in Table 1. As displayed in Table 2, 22.1 % of the survey participants teach at the elementary school level, while 12.6% and 65.3% of them teach a variety of content areas at the middle- and high-school levels, respectively. Table 3 lists a description of the 18 teachers who participated in an interview. Overall, the broad sample of teachers who participated in the study provided a rich body of feedback.

Table 2
Grade Level or Content Area Taught by Survey Participants

Grade Level or Content Area	Frequency (Number of Teachers)	Relative Frequencies (%)
<u>Elementary School</u>		
Grades K-2	10	10.5
Grades 3-5	11	11.6
<u>Middle School (Grades 6 – 8)</u>		
Language Arts	2	2.1
Science	3	3.2
Social Science	1	1.0
Resource/Special Education	1	1.0
Other	5	5.3
<u>High School (Grades 9-12)</u>		
Math	13	13.7
Language Arts	9	9.5
Science	4	4.2
Social Science	9	9.5
Resource/Special Education	6	6.3
Other	21	22.1

Note. Teachers listed in the *other* category taught foreign language, fine art, or physical education courses or did not specify what they taught.

Table 3

Description of the Interview Participants

Content Area	Teaching Experience (Years)	Content Area	Teaching Experience (Years)	Content Area	Teaching Experience (Years)
Math (HS)	47	Science (MS)	8	Science (MS)	20
Science (MS)	10	English (HS)	21	Math (HS)	7
English (HS)	11	Math (HS)	20	Life Skills (HS)	23
Math (HS)	9	4 th Grade	16	Math (HS)	30
Science (MS)	17	Social Studies and English (MS)	9	P.E/Math (MS)	9
Math (HS)	27	Math (HS)	7	Math (MS)	21

Note. MS = Middle School; HS = High School.

NHUSD. Most of the participants were the teachers from five schools in NHUSD. The California Department of Education (2011a) reports that 283 teachers staff the seven elementary schools, and 119 teachers staff the two middle schools. The single high school consists of 166 teachers, and the single continuation high school consists of 13 teachers. In all, there are 581 teachers in NHUSD, excluding the staff at the special-day school and in independent study programs. Although the study only included five of the eleven NHUSD schools, the sample is still representative of the district because it included teachers from the single high school, both middle schools, one elementary school that predominantly serves lower-achieving students, and one elementary school that predominantly serves higher-achieving students.

Another report from the California Department of Education (2011c) states that the school district serves 12,991 students. NHUSD teachers serve a diverse student population. Approximately 9.2% of NHUSD students are enrolled in special education programs, 23.9% are classified as English Learners, and 43.6% qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. NHUSD also serves students from various ethnic backgrounds, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Ethnic Composition of Students in NHUSD

Hispanic or Latino	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Pacific Islander or Filipino	African American	White	Two or More Races
34.2%	0.2%	22.0%	22.2%	9.0%	7.7%	4.5%

Note. Percentages do not at up to 100% due to rounding and a negligible number of students who did not report their ethnic background. Adapted from *Enrollment by ethnicity for 2010-11: District enrollment by ethnicity*, by California Department of Education, 2011, Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>. Reprinted with permission.

The large population of NHUSD students who (a) come from ethnic-minority backgrounds, (b) are designated as English Language Learners or special needs, and (c) qualify for free or reduced-priced meals was valuable to the study. Research has documented that such students typically score lower on state tests, so the pressure to raise test scores per NCLB requirements is particularly acute on the schools who serve a large population of these students. As a result, those schools commonly experience unfavorable effects of NCLB, such as the narrowed curriculum, the rush to cover numerous standards, an overemphasis on testing, and an increase in third-parties prescribing curriculum for teachers (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; McCarthey, 2008; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Sunderman et al., 2004; Valli & Buese, 2007).

Indeed, NHUSD has taken various steps to improve scores for all of its students. For instance, the school district has directed its schools to develop a quarterly benchmark-testing program and to utilize a computer-adaptive testing program created by the Northwest Evaluation Association to regularly assess students at specific grade levels for mastery of standards. Some students with lower achievement take an additional math or English course during the school day to receive extra help in those content areas while

elective courses in the arts or vocational training have disappeared: These are symptoms of the narrowed curriculum.

Both NHUSD and CCSSI share a focus on equity. In fact, *equity* is one of the principles that are listed in the NHUSD motto, and many of the district's policies reflect that principle. For example, NHUSD has joined the California Department of Education's push to have more students, instead of merely traditionally higher-achieving students, complete Algebra 1 by the eighth grade. Two years ago, NHUSD also adopted an open-enrollment policy for its honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes, meaning that any student who desires to take an honors- or AP-level course may elect to do so, despite not meeting all prerequisites for the course. In other words, NHUSD has invested substantial effort into giving all its students access to the same high-quality, educational opportunities, a goal that the Common Core effort is attempting to achieve.

Furthermore, NHUSD is located in California, a state that has vigorously implemented standards-based reforms. California has, for example, developed standards and test-based accountability many years before NCLB became law, and students must pass the California High School Exit Exam to receive their high school diploma. In general, NHUSD teachers have extensive experience teaching traditionally lower-achieving students and taking steps to promote educational equity while operating within California's long-established standards-based reform culture. These experiences consequently provide a unique perspective about the CCSS.

FUSD. For my sample, I included teachers from an additional elementary school from FUSD named Oliveira Elementary School. I invited teachers from this school to participate because they were relatively more familiar with the CCSS than most teachers

at other schools. Since the time that CCSS was adopted by the California State School Board, the principal at this school has been periodically sending articles about the new standards to her teaching staff. The principal further initiated conversations about the new standards during staff meetings. She wanted her teachers to “be aware of the two words: *Common Core*.” In turn, several Oliveira teachers took their own initiative to research the new standards on their own. Because of their greater familiarity with the CCSS, Oliveira teachers would be much more likely to provide judicious insight for answering the research questions.

The 23 teachers at Oliveira serve 584 students (California Department of Education, 2011b, 2011d). The California Department of Education (2011d) reports that 28.6% of these students are designated as English Learners, and 31.8% of them qualify for a free or reduced-priced lunch. Also, according to the principal, 9.6% of its students are enrolled in special education programs (L. Anderson, personal communication, March 14, 2012). Table 5 displays the ethnic composition of the student body.

Table 5
Ethnic Composition of Students for Oliveira Elementary

Hispanic or Latino	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Pacific Islander or Filipino	African American	White	Two or More Races
16.4%	0.7%	43.5%	12.4%	6.0%	14.9%	4.3%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding and a negligible number of students who did not report their ethnic background. Adapted from *Enrollment by ethnicity for 2010-11: School enrollment by ethnicity*, by California Department of Education, 2011, Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>. Reprinted with permission.

In contrast to the NHUSD, Oliveira serves a predominantly high-achieving student population. On most recent state tests, 69% and 91% of Oliveira students scored proficient or higher in language arts and math, respectively. Nonetheless, research has

suggested that even low-poverty, low-minority schools are significantly impacted by NCLB, although not to the same degree as high-poverty, high-minority schools (Smith & Kovacs, 2010). More important, Oliveira has long operated in California's standards-based reform policy environment, and with its teachers being relatively more familiar with the CCSS than most other teachers, including this school in the study helped to answer the original research questions.

Data Collection, Instruments, and Analysis

To recruit participants, I first contacted the principal of each school site. The goals were to introduce the study to the principals and to gain their permission for the teachers at the school to participate. With the principal acting as a liaison, I hoped to alleviate any concerns that teachers may have felt against being involved with the study or submitting opinions that they perceived to displease their superiors.

After securing permission from each of the principals, I asked each of them for time during a subsequent staff meeting so that I would be able to introduce myself, explain the study, and personally invite teachers to participate. At four of the six school sites, the principals granted me the opportunity to do so. Then, in an e-mail sent the next day, teachers received the link to the online survey, an invitation to be interviewed, and information about the conditions for anonymity. No time was available for introducing the study to the teachers during staff meetings at the other two school sites. So at one site, I wrote an e-mail containing an invitation to participate along with all relevant information; the principal then forwarded the e-mail to her staff. At the remaining site, the principal simply referred me to a curriculum leader in the math department, whereby I was able to recruit more participants on an individual basis by chain sampling.

Surveys. Survey Monkey provided the service to create and distribute the online, anonymous survey that I utilized to obtain quantitative data of teacher perceptions about the CCSS. I modified the questions from those that Smith and Kovacs (2011) and Mertler (2011) used in their surveys of teacher perceptions of NCLB. The survey consisted of two open-ended questions and 21 Likert-scale questions (see Appendix A). For the Likert-scale questions, participants rated their level of agreement with a series of statements. Possible responses included *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. I included a sixth option, *don't know*, because some teachers may not have held an opinion regarding a certain statement due to their lack of familiarity with the relatively new CCSS. I also provided space for participants to write their own comments to clarify their response to each Likert-scale question.

In a pilot test, I administered the survey to five teachers from neighboring school districts and a graduate-student classmate, who is also a high school teacher. These teachers commented about the readability, user-friendliness, and their experiences taking the survey. Based on these comments, I modified the original survey to make it more valid and easier to complete.

Interviews. I conducted open-ended interviews during the second phase of the study to triangulate and to further investigate the findings based on survey responses. Interview questions were designed to substantiate the responses from the survey, and the interviews were open-ended to allow participants to respond at length and to stimulate conversation (see Appendix B).

Several teachers offered to be interviewed upon completing the survey, while others agreed to being interviewed instead of responding to the survey. Some of these

teachers also referred their colleagues for interviews, allowing me to broaden the sample of interviewees through chain sampling. Using the interview protocol as a guide, I held open-ended conversations with 18 teachers, lasting from 20 minutes to 50 minutes. These interviews were one-on-one interviews to allow the interviewees to frankly share their opinions and outlook of the CCSS. I also recorded and transcribed each interview for further analysis.

Analysis of surveys and interviews. I processed surveys on an ongoing basis as participants submitted them electronically. While Survey Monkey software tallied the responses on the Likert-Scale questions, I read and coded the responses to the open-ended questions as well as the interview transcriptions. I then identified general trends that the responses to the Likert-scale questions revealed and summarized the themes that emerged from the coding process. Before observing these results in the next chapter, however, there are some validity and reliability issues that must be addressed.

Validity and Reliability Issues

Validity. One threat to the study's internal validity involved teachers who were less than honest when disclosing sentiments that they perceived would offend their superiors. Sharing concerns or criticisms about the CCSS fell into this category of sentiments. I dispelled this apprehension by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity among the participants and, more importantly, secured the support of administrators before conducting the study at all school sites.

Selection bias posed a second threat to the study's validity. For the study, there were three main, possible sources of selection bias. First, teachers who had stronger opinions may have been more likely to respond to the surveys and participate in the

interviews, potentially yielding inaccurate or biased data. Second, additional bias may have occurred because I used a non-random chain-sampling process to recruit some interviewees. Third, professional development to prepare teachers for the CCSS has not been widely implemented throughout California, much less NHUSD, and is just beginning in FUSD. As a result, teachers who were unfamiliar with the CCSS but possessed valuable insight may have felt that they were ill-equipped to participate in the study and hesitated to do so.

Therefore, I took steps to mitigate this potential selection bias. For instance, I repeatedly assured teachers that they did not need to be familiar with the CCSS to participate in the study. This effort proved helpful as many respondents still participated in the survey and interviews despite minimal knowledge of the new standards. Some teachers even decided to participate in the interview simply to learn more about the CCSS. Moreover, these teachers, being less familiar with the CCSS, were likely to be less opinionated about them. Their responses tempered the responses of participants who were more familiar with and, hence, more opinionated about the CCSS. As a result, potential selection bias that is caused by disproportionate participation by strongly opinionated teachers was diminished. Finally, the wide-ranging sample of teachers and large sample size for the study provided a broad set of responses, further protecting results against selection bias. Obtaining a broad and large sample also lessened any possible distortion that could have emerged from the use of chain sampling.

I also took several steps to determine how the data converged to make certain that all interviewees' statements aligned with general themes and were not reflections of one

interviewee's idiosyncrasies. These steps are discussed in the following section because they also serve to ensure that the data is reliable.

Reliability. Determining how data converged ensured that my observations and judgments about teacher perceptions, a variable which may be difficult to quantify, were consistent throughout the data collection process. Conducting multiple interviews and using a large sample size for the survey already made general trends in the responses more apparent. Taking additional steps such as asking interview questions that reflected survey questions, using an interview protocol to guide the open-ended conversations, and frequently asking interviewees to explain why participants responded a certain way on the survey further triangulated the data. During the interviews, I often restated in my own words the answers that the interviewees provided to make sure that I was interpreting their responses correctly. With other interviewees, I repeatedly discussed comments that arose during previous interviews to see if responses among all interviewees were in concert with each other.

One more point regarding reliability must be mentioned: State governments are currently developing assessments, evaluation systems, and professional development to implement the CCSS. Because this implementation process is ongoing, teachers' perceptions may change as they become more informed about the new standards. It is important to recognize, then, that the results from the study may be different at a later time because the survey and interviews take a snapshot of teacher perceptions at a given time.

This study, however, is still meaningful because a teacher's perception of the CCSS in their current state sheds important insight into whether the Common Core effort

will achieve its goals. The ever-shifting policy environment and corresponding changes in teacher perceptions may warrant concerns about this study's reliability, but understanding the present undoubtedly provides understanding into future. As suggested in the previous chapter, teachers shape policy based upon their existing knowledge and beliefs, which includes the existing perceptions based upon relatively limited knowledge of the CCSS. All these perceptions will ultimately come to bear upon the outcome of the CCSS, especially if current perceptions do not significantly change over time. Teachers may now hold certain feelings towards the CCSS that will remain constant or even intensify as they learn more and implement the CCSS in their classrooms. So what are these perceptions and feelings that the study found teachers to possess? Chapter four comprises these results.

Chapter 4: Results

This study is an investigation into two questions. First, what are teacher perceptions of the CCSS? And, second, how might these perceptions bear upon the outcome of the CCSS when they are implemented? To begin answering these questions, I conducted a survey and interviews of teachers. The results follow.

Survey Results

Survey questions fell into four categories: They are (a) familiarity with the CCSS; (b) overall impressions of the CCSS and the status quo; (c) beliefs of about the goals behind the CCSS; and (d) questions about teacher morale. Table 6 displays the results from the survey with questions grouped into their respective categories. Figures are listed as percentages.

In the last two columns of Table 6, the sum of teachers who expressed disagreement (i.e., *strongly disagree* or *disagree*) and the sum of teachers who expressed agreement (i.e., *strongly agree* or *agree*) are listed as a percentage of the total number of respondents less those who replied *don't know* for that particular survey question. These figures will be called the *adjusted sum* and used throughout the discussion. The reason for using the adjusted sum is to gauge only the responses of teachers who are familiar enough with the CCSS to have an opinion about the respective survey question. Because the CCSS are relatively new, not all teachers are equally aware of them. Although inferences can be drawn from the teachers who responded *don't know*, there is additional insight to be gained from focusing solely on the responses of teachers who are familiar enough with the CCSS to have not marked *don't know*. Limits to using the adjusted sum will be discussed in chapter 5.

Table 6
General Results from the Survey

<u>Survey Questions</u> (category in <i>italics</i>)	<u>Responses</u>						<u>Adjusted Sums</u>	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Disagree
<i>Familiarity with the CCSS</i>								
I am well-informed regarding what the Common Core Standards are. (n = 84)	4.8	15.5	17.9	31.0	27.4	3.6	21.0	60.5
I am sufficiently prepared through professional development to transition from teaching current standards to teaching the Common Core. (n = 83)	3.6	12.0	15.7	33.7	24.1	10.8	17.6	64.9
<i>Overall impressions of the CCSS and the status quo</i>								
Transitioning to the Common Core will require new or substantially revised curriculum materials and lesson plans. (n = 79)	7.6	30.4	21.5	16.5	2.5	21.5	48.4	24.2
In hindsight, No Child Left Behind was more of a positive step than a negative step for education reform. (n = 79)	1.3	6.3	10.1	27.8	50.6	3.8	7.9	81.6
The Common Core will have little impact on my everyday practice. (n = 82)	7.3	28.0	18.3	24.4	7.3	14.6	41.4	37.1
The work that I will put into preparing and transitioning to the Common Core will be worthwhile. (n = 82)	6.1	28.0	30.5	6.1	1.2	28.0	47.5	10.2

Table 6 (Continued)

Survey Questions (category in <i>italics</i>)	Responses						Adjusted Sums	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Disagree
I am concerned that under the Common Core, I will spend too much time preparing students for testing. (n = 81)	6.2	23.5	28.4	21.0	1.2	19.8	36.9	27.7
The implementation of the Common Core is more of a positive step than a negative step in education reform. (n = 83)	6.0	33.7	31.3	8.4	0.0	20.5	50.0	10.6
The Common Core will help me become a more effective teacher. (n = 83)	4.8	20.5	34.9	14.5	4.8	20.5	31.8	24.2
I look unfavorably upon the amount of time students currently spend on taking standardized tests. (n = 79)	35.4	44.3	10.1	3.8	5.1	1.3	80.8	9.0
The Common Core is a welcome change to the status quo. (n = 75)	2.7	21.3	29.3	17.3	1.3	28.0	33.3	25.9
<i>Beliefs of about the goals behind the CCSS</i>								
The Common Core will enable me to spend more time teaching higher-level (i.e., critical and creative) thinking skills. (n = 79)	3.8	15.2	35.4	19.0	1.3	25.3	25.4	27.1
I believe that the Common Core will help to raise student achievement. (n = 83)	4.8	20.5	39.8	10.8	2.4	21.7	32.3	16.9

Table 6 (Continued)

<u>Survey Questions</u> (category in <i>italics</i>)	<u>Responses</u>						<u>Adjusted Sums</u>	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Disagree
The Common Core – as a single, common set of curricular standards – will help to make collaboration and sharing of instructional materials more efficient. (n = 79)	3.8	29.1	25.3	20.3	2.5	19.0	40.6	28.1
I believe that the Common Core will be more effective than current standards at preparing students to be college- or career-ready upon high school graduation. (n = 83)	6.0	24.1	37.3	6.0	2.4	24.1	39.7	11.1
The Common Core standards are easier to understand than current standards. (n = 78)	1.3	21.8	35.9	7.7	2.6	30.8	33.3	14.8
<i>Questions about teacher morale</i>								
The Common Core makes me feel more like a professional. (n = 82)	1.2	8.5	34.1	30.5	7.3	18.3	11.9	46.3
I have a voice in creating and responding to new education-policy legislation, such as the Common Core standards. (n = 81)	1.2	9.9	14.8	38.3	32.1	3.7	11.5	73.1
I am concerned that the Common Core will restrict my creativity and the types of instructional strategies that I may use. (n = 81)	4.9	27.2	24.7	23.5	6.2	13.6	37.1	34.3

Table 6 (Continued)

<u>Survey Questions</u> (category in <i>italics</i>)	<u>Responses</u>						<u>Adjusted Sums^a</u>	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Disagree
I would encourage others to enter the teaching profession at this time. (n = 80)	5.0	21.3	32.5	28.8	11.3	1.3	26.6	40.5
I would like more decision-making power over the curriculum than what I believe the Common Core will permit. (n = 80)	17.5	26.3	26.3	7.5	0.0	22.5	56.5	9.7
Especially with the emergence of the Common Core, I feel that I am spending more effort to comply with mandates rather than to teach students to the best of my ability. (n = 81)	8.6	25.9	32.1	16.0	3.7	13.6	40.0	22.9

Note. All figures are percentages but not all percentages added up to 100 due to rounding; n = number of respondents who answered the survey question.

Familiarity with CCSS. There are several notable results from the survey questions. Overall, most teachers (60.5%) in the sample do not consider themselves well-informed about the CCSS and slightly more teachers (64.9%) do not feel prepared to begin teaching the new standards. For this reason, many teachers responded *neutral* or *don't know* to most of the questions.

Overall impressions of the CCSS and the status quo. Despite the lack of familiarity or preparedness, teachers generally have a favorable outlook towards the new standards. Of those with an opinion, most teachers (47.5%) believed that the work they must put into transitioning to teach under the new standards will be worthwhile,

compared to merely 10.2% who do not. About the same ratio of teachers considered the implementation of the CCSS a positive rather than a negative step in education reform (50.0% versus 10.6%). What is noteworthy, however, is that when asked if the CCSS are a welcome change to the status quo, only about 33.3% of teachers agreed while about 25.9% disagreed. So, although most teachers called the CCSS a positive rather than negative step in education reform, not as many would consider it a welcome change. There are reasons for this discrepancy, and they will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, it is worth mentioning that more teachers (36.9%) were concerned that there will still be an overemphasis on testing under the CCSS than those who did not (27.7%). After all, 80% of teachers unfavorably viewed the large amount of time that students currently spend taking tests under the NCLB environment and 81.6% of teachers judged NCLB more as a negative rather than a positive step in education reform.

Finally, when asked if new standards will have *little* impact on their everyday practice 41.4% of teachers agreed while a slightly smaller percentage of teachers disagreed (37.1%). This is a curious finding, considering that 48.4% of teachers agreed that teaching to the CCSS will require new or substantially revised curricular materials while merely half as many teachers (24.4%) disagreed. In other words, a considerable proportion of teachers did not believe their everyday practice will be affected much when the CCSS are implemented, even if there are substantial changes in curricular materials, much less new curricular *standards*.

Beliefs about the goals behind the CCSS. Other survey questions gauged teachers' perceptions of the major goals behind the implementation of the CCSS. More often than not, teachers agreed that the Common Core movement will be able to achieve

its goals. However, it is important to note that many teachers remained neutral on these issues because they felt that it was too early to speculate upon the CCSS's potential successes and shortfalls. For instance, 32.3% of teachers believed that the CCSS will help to raise student achievement, whereas about half that proportion (16.9%) did not. Likewise, 39.7% of teachers agreed that the CCSS will be more effective than current standards at preparing students to be college- or career-ready upon high school graduation; 11.1% of teachers disagreed. Regarding the clarity of the standards, one-third of teachers indicated that the CCSS are easier to understand than current standards, while a slightly less than half that figure (14.8%) felt otherwise. Yet in all these cases, about half of the respondents who did not reply *don't know* were neutral on these matters. These results, then, should be interpreted carefully and not exaggerated.

Meanwhile, 40.6% of teachers anticipated that collaboration and the sharing of instructional materials will become more efficient as over 40 states have adopted the same set of standards, albeit a noticeably large proportion of teachers (28.1%) thought that such efficiencies will not be achieved. However, teachers were not as markedly confident about the potential of the CCSS to enable them to spend more time teaching higher-level (i.e., critical and creative) thinking skills. About 25.4% of teachers thought that the CCSS will help them do so, but 27.1% disagreed.

Questions about teacher professionalism and morale. The last group of questions investigated how the CCSS impacted teacher professionalism and morale. Several significant themes emerged from these questions. Most teachers (73.1%) did not consider themselves as possessing a voice in creating and responding to the legislation of educational policy. In fact, 40% of teachers agreed with the statement that especially

with the emergence of the CCSS, they were spending more effort to comply with mandates rather than teaching students to the best of their ability; only a little more than half that proportion (22.9%) disagreed. Also, a majority of teachers (56.5% versus 9.7%) indicated that they would like more decision-making power over the curriculum than what they believed the CCSS would permit. And regarding whether the CCSS would restrict teachers' creativity and the types of instructional strategies that they may use, roughly the same number of teachers shared that concern as those who did not (37.1% versus 34.3%). Finally, four times as many teachers disagreed as agreed (46.3% versus 11.9%), though many remained neutral, when asked whether the CCSS made them feel more like a professional,.

Results from Interviews and the Open-Ended Survey Question

Although the Likert-scale questions on the survey revealed several noticeable trends, the quantitative data by itself was unable to fully explain the teachers' responses. Indeed, the original intent behind the Likert-scale questions was simply to construct the contours of existing teacher perceptions of the CCSS. Qualitative data from the open-ended survey questions and interviews conducted during the second phase of the study provided substance with which to fill these contours. For instance, one survey question asked whether the respondent agreed with the statement: "The implementation of the Common Core is more of a positive step than a negative step in education reform." A corresponding question on the interview protocol asks: "Compared with current curricular standards do you think the Common Core will be an improvement, make no difference, or make things worse? Explain." In the end, several themes and trends emerged from the responses to the open-ended survey questions and interviews. For the

sake of simplicity, the findings are reported in two main categories: (a) the quality of the standards and (b) testing and assessment systems for the CCSS. In the subsequent chapter, more fine-grained distinctions will be made to enhance a fuller discussion of these findings.

The quality of the standards. Teachers described the CCSS as more “general,” “vague,” “open-ended,” or “nebulous” than current standards, which are filled with excessive “minutia” and “intricate things that kids need to know.” Many noted that there seemed to be a reduction in the number of standards in the CCSS when compared with California’s current state standards. “[The CCSS are] more condensed; [they’re] deeper – more depth and less breadth,” described one interviewee.

Teachers approved of this “quality over quantity” or “less is more” approach, where students would learn a narrower range of curriculum but learn it well. One high school math teacher described the new standards as “taking out some of the feeling of being overwhelmed” by the numerous topics she had to cover under current standards. Because there appears to be fewer topics in the CCSS, teachers anticipated that they would be able to do what is presently unfeasible given the rush to cover current standards. For example, they believed they will be able (a) to cover topics in greater depth, (b) to spend more time reteaching or reviewing topics for their students’ benefit, (c) to better focus on cultivating critical thinking skills rather than just rote memorization, and (d) to use more innovative lessons that make learning more fun and relevant to their students’ everyday lives. Moreover, teachers believed that attaining student proficiency and raising achievement would be more doable with fewer standards to cover and additional time to cover them more slowly and more thoroughly. One teacher thought the

“smaller, broader approach” would help her “feel less [like a failure]” and “be happier with the job.” For these reasons, many interviewees found the CCSS “appealing” and judged them to be “a step in the right direction.”

Yet, “a step in the right direction” does not mean that there are problems with the CCSS. Some interviewees feared that the lack of specificity in the new standards would be “open to interpretation.” One interviewee posited, “It’s left for someone to look at something and say, ‘Well, I *did* cover that’ because it is so vague.” The worry is that the quality of the curriculum could be compromised if teachers are allowed to omit content that is not explicitly delineated by the standards. This possibility does not help to ensure that all students are receiving a common curriculum, which is a prerequisite for educational equity and a major goal of the Common Core movement. Nevertheless, teachers hoped that in the end, the CCSS will provide more consistency in curriculum. Due to the numerous current standards, teachers follow their own respective idiosyncrasies when picking which topics to omit or to include in their courses. In contrast, with possibly a fewer the number of standards in the CCSS, teachers may not have to choose what or what not to include because covering all standards may be more feasible.

However, some teachers were also wary that the CCSS may turn out not to contain fewer topics. For instance, one math teacher wondered, “Algebra is algebra....I don’t know what [can be] cut out of [the Algebra curriculum that we now have].” Other teachers added that though the CCSS may have a shorter list of standards, the actual amount of content that teachers still must cover may not be significantly fewer. A middle-school math teacher objected:

We still have to get those kids through those standards even though they aren't *standards*. They still have to learn them. Maybe they are little general, but it's not going to stop the teachers from having to do what they have to do to get to that one.

Likewise, when interviewees became notified that the CCSS are designed to compose at least 85% of the curriculum (i.e., each state may add up to 15% more curricular content in addition to the CCSS), they expressed concern that the number of standards could excessively increase. "Perfect," one interviewee sarcastically remarked. "Maybe if [all states] stopped at 85%, everybody would be better off." In fact, one teacher who appreciated the reduction wanted policy writers to reduce the number of standards even more.

Teachers generally hoped that the amount of curriculum and level of mastery that students are expected to attain will be reasonable given the limited amount of available time and resources to serve students of varying abilities, but they are not without doubt. Many teachers repeatedly maintained that they were neither listened to nor involved with the development of the CCSS. It appeared to most teachers that the decision-making process was out of their hands and, instead, predominantly controlled by individuals who were far-removed from and ill-informed about everyday classroom reality. Thus, teachers worried that writers of the CCSS do not have "a pulse of what our kids can do." Time after time, they implored those writers to "be realistic" and to make sure the expectations are appropriate for students at their respective ages. Although teachers agreed with having high expectations, they were wary of pushing their students too hard and "over the edge." Inappropriately high expectations simply "set up kids for failure,"

causing them to be “turned off from schooling,” they warned. This was their view of current standards, and they feared that the CCSS does not address this issue, especially when they are presented as “college and career-ready” standards. One interviewee lamented that “at some point, we are stopping them from going to college if we keep giving them things before they are ready, and by doing that, they lose their confidence, they can’t do it, they can’t perform well.” In short, teachers felt that policymakers are not familiar enough with the particularities of students and local school contexts in order to exercise the necessary prudence to most effectively and efficiently serve students. It is why one interviewee, speaking on behalf of her colleagues, mused, “I hope that finally teachers can be trusted to implement the standards in the way they know is best for their students.”

Concerns with Testing. Other remarks pertained to testing. Many participants approved of the use of regular benchmark exams throughout the year: a feature of the assessment system that developers of the CCSS plan to implement (Kendall, 2011). Interviewees explained that these regular assessments provide valuable, ongoing feedback about student progress, and the picture of how well the student is doing would likely be more valid than one that a single end-of-year exam provides. Teachers also believed that common assessments, which will be utilized under the CCSS, will improve collaborative work for teachers as they will be able to more efficiently compare results with each other and work together to better meet their students’ needs. Some teachers additionally welcomed the idea of national assessments for further comparisons of student achievement between states. However, the teachers’ support ended there.

Most teachers were leery of the continued emphasis on testing. One comment captured the sentiment: “I wonder to what extent they will increase mandates on instructional strategies and testing. As they have not been implemented yet, I caution the attitude to increase these things.” There were several reasons for such uneasiness.

First, though teachers appreciate the information they receive from regularly assessing their students, they also fear that the assessments for CCSS will just be another “punitive tool” much like the NCLB assessment system. Several interviewees expressed concerns that Common Core assessment systems will be used for additional purposes, such as implementing teacher-evaluation or merit-pay systems. One objection to using test scores for these purposes is that they do not provide a valid measure of teacher performance, especially when they are used as the primary measuring tool. In short, teachers maintained that there are more factors behind how well or poorly students perform on a test than merely how their teacher has affected them.

Second, teachers pointed out that tests themselves do not provide the entire picture of how well a student is doing; one math teacher’s experience with some of her students illustrates this point:

It’s one of the biggest accomplishments I am so proud of. Those kids did not do well on the test, but they’re going to college. And they have faith in themselves that they can do math. They never performed well on tests to begin with, and they’re totally stressed on them. But I found that they do have mathematical abilities and pull it out of them. And sorry I can’t prove it on a test.

Another interviewee summarized the prevailing view: “I think standardized tests have a place in what we do....But I don’t think that the standardized tests are the be-all, end-all

of what we do. I don't think they are the only way to measure student success."

Teachers believed that success looks different for each student. No two students progress at the same rate, and all students come from different life circumstances. Thus, teachers maintained that test scores, for what they are worth, do not account for all the important considerations that must be made when defining and measuring *success*.

Third, teachers are apprehensive about how much testing will control their everyday practice. Interviewees acknowledged that they are still able to be innovative and creative with their lessons even with standards and tests directing what they are to teach. They also acknowledged the importance of having accountability and ensuring that each teacher is doing an effective job. Nevertheless, they expressed the desire to have more flexibility with their everyday work, which testing may not necessarily allow. Many interviewees shared the concern that if the Common Core assessment system includes regular benchmarks, it would then establish a de facto pace and sequence of curriculum. One science teacher commented:

Are they going to say in January, you're going to test this? In that case, it's also going to limit our ideas with what unit we are going to teach and at what time....We always like to throw in some fun activities for the kids too. And then if everything is timed, then there goes all the fun stuff out the window which they actually learn from.

Another science teacher was disheartened that her own effective, innovative approach to curriculum may be stifled by Common Core assessment systems:

If there is going to be something like national quarterly benchmarks...I would hate that....That would dictate the order....I'm teaching density right now, and I

love teaching density right before I teach forces because the buoyancy forces leads right into it. No one else does it like that. But I love doing it that way, and I can justify it....So, once you start to do quarterly things then we're sunk. I mean, that really would tie my hands.

Given pressure for students to perform well on those tests, teachers additionally anticipated that they would still be required to commit a substantial amount of instructional time for "test preparation." Much to their disappointment, they believed that they could use that time creating better learning experiences for their students. If testing turns out to "dictate more of what's going on" in classrooms, teachers felt that they would not be able to tailor the curriculum in the ways that they think would be best for their own students.

Finally, teachers questioned whether the costs in time, resources, and effort to conduct the assessments for the CCSS outweighed their benefits. One interviewee doubted the utility of conducting many tests: "Give teachers some credit. We know a lot about how much our kids are bad at things or good at things. So I don't know that [the tests are] necessarily instructive." Testing also costs money to implement, and in a time when state governments face tight budgets, teachers wondered whether testing is the best use of available funds. In addition, NHUSD teachers are accustomed to spending several school days administering the tests that the California government and their district office require. A middle school teacher explained:

In this district, we take two days three times a year to do Northwest Evaluation Association testing [a computer-adaptive test used to measure students' academic progress, which was prescribed by the school district]. Then we do a week of

STAR testing [California state tests]. So right there is eleven days of teaching just for these tests. And then we usually are forced to do some kind of benchmark to compare each other so that's another few days. But then you throw in the furlough days and we're down a month of teaching.

Many other interviewees performed similar calculations to convey the same point. In the teachers' view, there were better ways to use the time and resources that they spent administering these tests. Moreover, many teachers have frequently observed their students being stressed out by the amount of testing that occurs. "You risk burning the kids out on that because I've seen that happen within our district with the [Northwest Evaluation Association test] that our kids are taking," one interviewee bemoaned. Thus, teachers were wary of continuing or even increasing this emphasis.

Some Final Observations

Although a few teachers viewed the CCSS as an auspicious development in education, the vast majority did not. Most considered themselves as "welcoming" to the new standards but only because "anything is better than what we have right now." In the words of another teacher, "The Common Core is positive by comparison, not because I actually am hopeful for it." Much to their disappointment, teachers felt that the CCSS are still too deeply confined within the standards-based reform framework and does not adequately address the shortfalls of that type of reform.

Similarly, a few teachers perceived the CCSS as a paradigm shift in education, but the vast majority did not. Many teachers frankly admitted that they do not foresee changing much of what they already do. Even one interviewee who was relatively more familiar with the CCSS predicted, "Realistically, teachers are going to still keep teaching

what they were teaching for the state standards and they're going to see where it fits in the Common Core."

Nevertheless, teachers will readily embrace the potential benefits that the CCSS offer and will "keep at it" when it comes to giving their best at their vocation. One interviewee's described it best:

But we'll do the best we can with what we've got like we always do. I think teachers are pretty resilient. They're stubborn and inflexible sometimes. If you give us something as a mass, we generally say, "Let me take a lot at it."

And given their willingness to try to make it work, teachers have asked not only for the resources but also the time to do so. They feared that policymakers may alter policy too quickly, not allowing enough time to pass in order to give the CCSS a fair evaluation. "If we're going to do this, let's give it time to really work," pleaded one teacher. As some teachers pointed out, the results of the CCSS will not be noticeable for several years as schools and the rest of the education system adjusts.

So, how successful will the CCSS be? Certainly, no one can predict exactly what will happen. However, at the very least, the picture of teachers' current perceptions sheds some light into what may transpire. The implications of teacher perceptions of the CCSS and how they bear upon the outcome of the new standards follow in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results of this study's inquiry into teacher perceptions of the CCSS and how those perceptions may bear upon the outcome of the CCSS are summarized in the previous chapter. In this chapter is a discussion of how those results pertain to existing literature as well as the conclusions and implications of those results. Following that discussion are remarks about the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

Results and the First Research Question: Teacher Perceptions of the CCSS

Teacher perceptions of the Common Core effort generally pertain to its curricular standards and assessment system. Underlying their opinions is a desire to make sure their students are well-served.

Perceptions about the new standards. Teachers primarily raised two issues regarding the new standards: (a) the breadth of the standards and (b) the appropriateness of the standards.

Having fewer standards is good. Teachers indicated on the survey and in interviews that they currently experience the negative consequences of the “mile-wide and inch-deep” curriculum which have been widely documented in research (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hamilton et al., 2008; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Given this experience, teachers find the narrower breadth and greater depth of the CCSS appealing. Under the CCSS, they feel that they will be able to more thoroughly cover curriculum at a slower pace while better nurturing higher-level thinking skills in their students. This is one reason why survey respondents indicated that the CCSS will be more conducive to preparing students to be college- or career-ready.

These findings are consistent with the claims of CCSS supporters who assert that the new standards are indeed fewer in number, allowing for the in-depth coverage of the content that is necessary for greater academic proficiency (Haycock, 2010; Kendall, 2011; Rothman, 2011).

But will there truly be fewer standards? Though the fewer number of standards is a major positive aspect of the CCSS, teachers are aware that the number of standards may turn out to not be few enough. They are worried that the additional 15% of content that each state is allowed to add to the CCSS may remove the benefits of fewer standards. In fact, some teachers maintained that the breadth of the new standards is still too wide and should be further narrowed: an observation consistent with the findings of Porter et al. (2011) who argue that the breadth of the CCSS is not much of an improvement compared to current standards.

Ultimately, if thoroughly covering all the standards at a reasonable pace is not doable and teachers still are unable to nurture critical-thinking skills to a satisfactory level, then the “less is more” or “quality over quantity” approach that teachers believe to be better for the students will not be realized. If so, such circumstances would merely continue the rush through the curriculum, which has been a major criticism for NCLB. Having fewer standards has been a much-touted goal of the CCSS developers, but it is possible that those developers will neither achieve that goal nor secure benefits that come with achieving that goal. If so, the inability to maintain a narrow breadth of topics to cover raises doubts about the CCSS’s potential to remedy the rushing through the curriculum that currently happens under NCLB.

Make sure they are appropriate. Even supposing that there are fewer standards as the Common Core developers intended, ensuring a fewer number standards is not the only aspect of the new standards that will bear upon the outcome of the Common Core movement. One of the most frequently repeated pleas from teachers who participated in the study was for policymakers to “be realistic” with what all students of all backgrounds can achieve over the course of a year. One teacher illustrated the point: “We have so many discrepancies and so many disparities that I’m a little concerned that [the CCSS are] going to be kind of an extra-large t-shirt. What about the kids that weighs 30 lbs?” Although teachers agree that all students should have access to the same educational opportunities and should be held to high expectations, they also acknowledge that it is foolhardy and harmful to hold students to unreachable expectations, especially those students who possess low academic skills, English deficiencies, special needs, or lower grade-level competencies.

Teachers want to hold their students to high *but appropriate* expectations. The Common Core effort is aimed to better serve students, but teachers warn that students are not well-served when they are held to inappropriate expectations. An interviewee explained:

Yes, let’s raise our expectations. Let’s raise the bar as high as we can. But we can’t hit the bar as it is now. So, on the one hand, I understand the philosophy that if we only have bonehead algebra, kids will only do bonehead performance. But if you have everyone at Algebra 2, and kids can’t even multiply and subtract, then you’re going to lose 90% of them....So there’s a balance.

While commenting on holding students to high but appropriate expectations, a survey respondent frankly wrote: “The Common Core will not help raise student achievement if students continue to be put in classes that they are ill-prepared for.” Numerous participants in the surveys and interviews communicated the same opinion, appealing policymakers to ensure that the CCSS are “developmentally appropriate.” Teachers maintain that the best way to serve students is to not only to raise expectations but also to be reasonable with what particular students are able to accomplish as they are being pushed towards higher achievement.

In light of the need for appropriate standards, the goals pushed by Kendall (2011), Ravitch (2010), Rothman (2011), and other supporters of the CCSS to provide all students with the same education opportunities and to hold them to the same high performance expectations may be well-intentioned but somewhat misguided. Study participants seem to suggest that although shortchanging certain students with a poor-quality education ought not to occur, students can also be shortchanged in their education if they must learn standards which they unprepared to learn and held to expectations that are unreachable for them. In both cases, students are not well-served.

Perceptions about a Common Core assessment system. Teachers also have much to say about the continued emphasis on standardized testing under the CCSS. Specifically, they are apprehensive about (a) the vast amount of time and resources that is spent on testing, (b) the ways testing narrows the curriculum and dictates teaching practice, and (c) the possible misuse of test scores that results in invalid judgments about students and teachers. Having experienced similar negative consequences of testing

under NCLB, teachers' apprehensions about the Common Core assessment system are not unreasonable.

The amount of time and resources that are spent on testing. Survey respondents disapproved of the amount of time students currently spend on testing. Interviewees elaborated upon exactly how many days are used to administer the tests, and explained that this time could be spent serving students in better ways. Others expressed their disappointment with witnessing students becoming lackadaisical or even experiencing burnout because of the onerous amount of test-taking and test-preparation. These observations echo what other research has found (Deniston & Gerrity, 2011; McCarthy, 2008; Mertler, 2011; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Pedulla et al, 2003; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Teachers are already doubtful that the benefits derived from current testing outweigh the costs, and with the CCSS not appearing to greatly decrease the amount and scope of testing, the costs of testing will need to be closely monitored.

The ways testing narrows the curriculum and influences teaching practice. Teachers are also worried that testing will continue to adversely influence their everyday practice as it does now within the NCLB policy environment. Because student achievement under the CCSS will still be measured by an assessment system, teachers do not anticipate the amount of test preparation decreasing. In fact, one teacher who attended a major education conference reported that a prevailing view about the CCSS among educators at the conference was "if we're teaching to a test, at least we're teaching to a better test." Essentially, teachers remain concerned that the pressure to produce sufficient test scores will continue to drive practice and compete against their beliefs regarding how to best serve their students. It is a concern that is well-documented

(Deniston & Gerrity, 2011; Palmer & Rangel 2011; Pedulla et al., 2003; Smith & Kovacs, 2010).

In addition, this study has uncovered a less-often discussed issue: Testing can drive the pacing and sequencing of curriculum if it is administered regularly. This is certainly a newer development because under NCLB, students are only tested once towards the end of the school year. In contrast, the Common Core assessment system may consist of several regular assessments. If so, standardized testing might drive curriculum in ways which have not been widely studied and will be an important topic for future research. At any rate, it appears that testing may still have nontrivial effects on teaching practice, continuing what Hamilton et al. (2008) observed: “The tests rather than the standards tend to drive practice” (p. 44).

The use of test scores to make invalid judgments about students and teachers.

Yet, even if they are somehow able to avoid letting the tests influence their practice, teachers remained leery of the limits of what a test score can reveal about a student. The developers of the assessments for the CCSS plan to design tests that will be administered more frequently and will measure higher-level thinking skills (Kendall, 2011; Rothman, 2011). Designing these types of tests, as research suggests, may provide a more valid picture of student progress and needs (Hamilton et al., 2007; Kendall, 2011; Mertler, 2011; McMurrer, 2006; Pedulla et al., 2003; Rothman, 2011). However, teachers still maintain that even a more elaborate system of tests still only comprise a single measure that may not capture all that is important for evaluating student success, corroborating findings from other research (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Crocco & Costigan, 2007;

McCarthy, 2008; Pedulla et al., 2003; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Teachers are not opposed to testing per se but rather an overreliance on and overemphasis of testing.

Teachers are even more guarded regarding how any new assessment system will be used to measure their own performance. To be fair, CCSS developers insist that the assessments are only a tool for teachers to better diagnose and address their students' needs (Kendall, 2011). Teachers generally welcome using assessments this way, insofar as it does not affect them in ways that contend against their beliefs of good practice. Nonetheless, it must be noted that teacher concerns about possible teacher-evaluation systems that may emerge under the CCSS are not unfounded. In the Race to the Top program, states were more poised to receive federal funds for education not only by adopting the CCSS, but also by creating systems for teacher- and principal-evaluation (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). More recently, states have the opportunity to receive waivers from NCLB requirements, but along with adopting the CCSS or other college- and career ready standards, states must develop a "rigorous and comprehensive plan" to implement teacher- and principal-evaluation systems on order to earn a waiver from the federal government (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a, p. 2). So, teachers are understandably concerned when the federal push to adopt the CCSS is closely tied with the push to establish teacher evaluation systems.

The big picture: A top-down effort versus wanting to do what is best for the kids. Underlying these views towards the Common Core assessment system and standards is the widespread perception that the Common Core movement is another "top-down" reform effort, to use the words of some interviewees. Survey respondents shared this perception as well. Most agreed that especially with the emergence of the CCSS,

they were spending more effort to comply with mandates rather than to teach their students to the best of their ability. An even larger majority of survey respondents indicated that they did not have a voice in creating and responding to new education-policy legislation, such as the CCSS. This perceived top-down approach of the CCSS is also the reason more teachers more often than not disagreed that the Common Core movement made them feel more like a professional.

Teachers frown upon this top-down aspect of the CCSS. On interviewee comments:

I think [the CCSS are] better than current standards that we have, but I'm also leery of everything coming from the top down....I'm not a fan of too much coming down from Washington or Sacramento or the district.

In their view, the main consequence of the top-down approach is that it does not serve students in the best possible way. Teachers alluded to the notion that policymakers are too far-removed from everyday classroom realities and too out of touch with students' complex, multi-faceted needs. Nor can test scores capture all the information that is necessary for understanding and meeting those needs. Teachers, as a result, believe that decisions made by policymakers are not the most beneficial for students. This is not a new sentiment. Research has documented that the teachers feel this way towards the top-down approach of NCLB where decisions are typically made to meet policy demands, such as attaining adequate test scores or meeting accountability requirements, at the expense of meeting student needs in the best possible way (Crocco & Costigan, 2009; Deniston & Gerrity, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2008; McCarthy 2008; Mertler, 2011; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Pedulla et al., 2003; Smith & Kovacs, 2011; Valli & Buese,

2007). The results of the study corroborate McCluskey and Coulson's (2007) assertion that top-down reform "has created a sprawling impersonal bureaucracy in a field that demands, by its very nature, considerable individualization and personal attention" (p. 11).

Teachers not only believe that policymakers behind NCLB or the CCSS are unfamiliar with the particulars about students and, hence, lack the "necessary prudence" to help students in the best possible ways. However, teachers also fear that they themselves will be hampered from helping students in ways they think best by the need to comply with policy demands. Concerns about testing compete against what teachers consider to be most beneficial for their students. Teachers hope that the purportedly fewer number of topics that they must cover for their classes will truly turn out to be manageable and that what students are expected to learn will be appropriate. One interviewee wished that "finally teachers can be trusted to implement the standards in the way they know is best for their students," but doubted that such would be the case. This sentiment is further demonstrated on the survey where 56.5% of teachers desired more decision-making power over the curriculum than what they believed the CCSS would permit, compared to merely 9.7% who did not. In addition, numerous survey respondents pleaded for policymakers to gather teacher input for writing future standards or evaluating the progress of the CCSS as it is implemented over the next few years. That way, policymakers can have a better understanding of the local contexts and make sounder policy decisions in response to such information.

Summary of Teacher Perceptions of the CCSS: Limited Optimism and Modest Expectation. This study finds that teachers' perceptions of the CCSS do not

form in a vacuum but are grounded in their understanding of NCLB and other current policies. The result confirms Tyack and Cuban's (1995) argument that "innovations never enter educational institutions with the previous slate wiped clean" (p. 83). Even before the implementation of the CCSS in everyday classrooms, teachers are already imagining what their work will be like under the new system. Their judgments of new policy are based upon their experiences regarding past and current policy. Thus, this study supports what recent research on policy implementation has found: Teachers draw upon "what is already familiar to them" to make sense of and form perceptions of new policy, (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p. 342; see also Coburn, 2004; Honig, 2006; Palmer & Rangel, 2011).

The first research question asked the following: What are teachers' present perceptions of the CCSS? Results indicated that in general, what teachers appreciated about the CCSS were the aspects that served to either correct the shortfalls of NCLB or to continue what was beneficial about NCLB. Conversely, teachers have an aversion towards aspects of the CCSS that continue or worsen what they perceive to be problems with NCLB.

That is to say, teachers have mixed feelings about the CCSS. These mixed feelings are reflected in the survey where most respondents agreed that the implementation of the CCSS is a positive step in education reform but far less agree that it is a welcome change to the status quo. A survey respondent elaborating on his response to these questions writes, "I think it's a step in the right direction but it doesn't change the reliance on testing or lack of focus on creativity in teaching and learning." One interviewee explained why the CCSS was not completely appealing to her: "It's still

standards to me,” she said. It is still “confined in the standards framework” and not “outside the box yet.” Another adds that the simple shift from state to national standards would not make teaching “radically different.”

Further, although some teachers hoped that having new standards would cause a “shake-up” (i.e., galvanize them to take steps to become better teachers), many remained unconvinced that such a “shake-up” would happen. Interviewees predicted that realistically, most teachers would simply teach the same curriculum while adding the topics that they are not currently covering but are required to cover per the CCSS. Participants maintained that the CCSS would not dramatically improve teachers who are already working hard to help their own students meet high expectations. It is one reason why not many survey respondents agreed that the CCSS would help them become more effective teachers. In other words, teachers welcome the standards with very limited optimism and modest expectations. They do not expect substantial change. They readily accept the potential benefits of the CCSS while simultaneously recognizing potential problems.

Results and the Second Research Question: How Teacher Perceptions of the CCSS Bear Upon Their Outcome

The mixed feelings that teachers have towards the CCSS will ultimately shape their outcome. Palmer and Rangel (2011) explain that teachers undergo a “sense-making” process in which they react to and reconcile aspects of policy that challenge their beliefs about best teaching practices. In turn, this process shapes original policy ideas and influences their outcomes. One may then say that a policy acts upon teachers, but teachers then form perceptions about that policy and act back upon it, giving it new

form (p. 619; see also Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Therefore, the second research question asks the following: How do teachers' perceptions of the CCSS bear upon its outcome as implementation progresses?

Because the implementation of the CCSS is still in its early stages, the study is unable to predict exactly how teachers will adjust their practice in response to new policy demands and how those adjustments will ultimately affect the fate of the CCSS. However, the results of the study, together with findings from past research, suggest two important points. For one, inferences about teacher morale and how teacher morale might affect the outcomes of the CCSS can be drawn. Second, some considerations should be made regarding policy development based on teacher perceptions of the CCSS.

Low teacher morale. Recent research reveals that NCLB and other standards-based-reform efforts are negatively lowering teacher morale (Deniston & Gerrity, 2011; Mertler, 2011; Sunderman et al., 2004). It is vital to understand the causes behind lowered teacher morale and how they are relevant to the CCSS.

Some causes of low morale. As mentioned earlier, complying with policy demands frequently competes with what teachers believe to be best for students. The crucial point is that the teachers' morale lowers when they perceive that their students are adversely affected by policies or are not having their needs met in the best possible ways because of those policies. Teachers clearly exhibited similar discouragement when stating concerns about the CCSS (e.g., the expectations being inappropriate or the undesirable ways testing affects teaching). The association between low teacher morale and not being able to serve students in the best possible way is also observed by other research (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; McCarthy, 2008; Palmer & Rangel, 2011; Pedulla et.

al, 2003; Smith and Kovacs, 2011). This study and other research also find that morale lowers when teachers perceive reform to be driven by a top-down approach. The reason for this is that teachers are not treated as professionals who can be trusted to make sound decisions to serve their students effectively (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2007).

Why morale matters. What is significant about teacher morale is that low morale is not conducive for generating teacher support of the policy idea. In turn, teachers will be less wholehearted about trying to successfully achieve the policy's goals or stop trying altogether. Research suggests this to be the case (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Center on Education Policy, 2006; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Deniston & Gerrity, 2011; Pedulla et al., 2003; Smith & Kovacs, 2011; Sunderman et al., 2004). Therefore, if the Common Core effort does little to improve teacher morale or, worse, further lowers it, then achieving goals behind that effort may be more difficult to realize.

Most interviewees acknowledged that teacher morale is currently very low and predict that the emergence of the CCSS will do nothing to change it. Some teachers felt that there were other sources of low teacher morale besides the way policies, such as the CCSS, are imposed upon them. Others simply could not imagine already-low morale decreasing any further. Nevertheless, several teachers mentioned that because the CCSS remains a top-down, standards-based-reform approach to education reform, they do not foresee morale noticeably improving, if at all. Nor is the lack of improved morale the most positive outcome that CCSS supporters would probably hope to see.

Conversely, a few teachers felt that the CCSS might improve morale because of the narrowed breadth and increased depth of the standards. One interviewee was elated

that she would be able to better serve her students because of the greater focus on critical thinking. Another interviewee hypothesized that because of the fewer number of standards, teachers would be able to proceed at a slower pace and thoroughly cover all the necessary topics; accordingly, teachers would feel less like a failure for not sufficiently covering everything and “be happier with the job.” Certainly, there are palatable aspects to the CCSS, and teachers are “trying to keep an open mind” about the new standards. Besides, as most interviewees and survey respondents noted, the current NCLB system needs changing and in the words of one teacher, “Anything is better than what we have right now.” However, whether the conditions for teaching will improve enough to impact morale is contingent upon what ultimately occurs under the CCSS (e.g., whether there will indeed be fewer standards, whether testing will negatively influence teaching practice, and whether teachers will have the freedom to meet student needs in the way they deem best).

Conclusions: Recommendations for policy. What, then, can be done to raise morale and, by extension, to improve the outcomes of CCSS. Conclusions may be drawn from the perceptions that teachers shared. Three that will be discussed are (a) the need for flexibility, (b) the need for time, and (c) the need for preparation and resources.

The need for flexibility. Teachers emphasized that policymakers are too far-removed from the students and everyday classrooms. Hence, policymakers do not know enough particulars of local contexts in order to find the best solutions for improving schooling. In response, it may behoove policymakers to grant more flexibility to schools. That way, teachers and administrators are able to freely exercise the prudence that is necessary for addressing student needs in the best possible fashion.

After all, personnel at the local school are more familiar with the rich details of their students' lives. As participants throughout the study have argued, having and understanding these rich details is crucial to have the "personal interaction" and "human touch" that is required for effectively serving students. Spears and Loomis (2009) make a similar argument in their book *Education for Human Flourishing: A Christian Perspective*. If the CCSS does not afford sufficient flexibility, then doubts may be raised against its potential effectualness. Education policies that are intended to better serve students must empower teachers and other implementers to do so, not hamper them from it.

Practically speaking, providing more flexibility may allow teachers to, for example, avoid the adverse ways that testing influencing teaching practice or to tailor curriculum so that it is more appropriate for each student. Hence, policymakers should consider allowing schools or school districts to decide for themselves how they will use assessments. Similarly, state governments should exercise restraint before adding more required curriculum to the CCSS and instead, grant schools, school districts, and even parents the prerogative to determine the curriculum that the students will be taught as well as the expectations to which the students will be held.

Granting flexibility to teachers can also be construed as a gesture to demonstrate that policymakers trust teachers and affirm teachers' dedication to serve students. Doing so may improve morale, which may generate more support of the CCSS among teachers. At the very least, improved morale would help to reinvigorate teachers to wholeheartedly serve their students. Conversely, not granting sufficient flexibility may adversely affect morale. Indeed, interviewees at one school site admired their collaborative efforts to

design a rich and appropriate curriculum for students of all levels, but if the CCSS and associated policies do not afford enough flexibility, they fear that it will upend all the good work that they have put into creating such a curriculum.

Notably, there is a tension between providing flexibility and ensuring a uniform curriculum. Hamilton et al. (2008) suggest, “[Teacher] autonomy and alignment [of curriculum] may be competing goals” (p. 50). Ensuring that all teachers teach the same curriculum demands certain boundaries to delineate what teachers are able or unable to teach. Interviewees also alluded to this tension; they expressed the desire to have more control over the curriculum but acknowledge the need to delineate curriculum up to a point. Otherwise, there would be too much variation among what teachers teach and students learn. There must be a balance between autonomy and alignment and how much the CCSS achieves a suitable balance remains to be seen. Given the top-down nature of the CCSS and their greater emphasis on providing a uniform curriculum than on teaching standards that most appropriately meet the unique needs of individual students, there is reason to believe that the CCSS will err on the side of alignment at the expense of autonomy. To counterbalance this likely, preexisting bias towards alignment, policymakers may desire to consider offering more flexibility to teachers, administrators, schools, and other more localized education agencies.

The need for time. Along with granting flexibility, policymakers should “commit a fair amount of time to see if [the CCSS] really work,” to use the words of one interviewee. Many other participants made known their desire for more time because they recognize that policies tend to change impulsively. “It seems that the legislators and the people up high want to just jump out as soon as something goes wrong,” a math

teacher remarked. Teachers requested the need for time because they realize that the effects of the CCSS will not be fully observable for several years as students, teachers, and the education system transition and adjust to the new system. Teachers are not expecting many gains in the short-term. They ask policymakers to hold the same modest expectations for the near future and to not become alarmed or make significant changes if outcomes fall short of expectations.

Teachers are frustrated when they finally become accustomed to a policy idea after working with it for a long duration of time only to see policymakers suddenly change it. One survey respondent pled, “Don't keep changing your minds! Changing policies and philosophies on a whim doesn't help the students' education or teachers' effectiveness.” The resulting frustration has led one interviewee to the following assessment of his colleagues:

I think teachers are more cynical than they've been because of all the things that go on – the things that come from outside the classroom. A lot of that individual control has been taken away. You have to answer to higher powers.

It is worth mentioning that such loss of control and frustration has been another cause of lower teacher morale, an observation which this study as well as past studies have also made (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2007; Pedulla, 2003; Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Fortunately, developers of the CCSS recognize the frustration that short-lived policies and a policy environment that is constantly in limbo can cause (Rothman, 2011). Nonetheless, only time will reveal how long the CCSS will last before the next sweeping reform occurs.

This ever-changing policy environment is also why some survey respondents and interviewees viewed the CCSS as another “passing fad.” Such a view is not conducive to generating support for a new policy. Teachers do not find it a worthwhile to expend much effort and to make adjustments merely to comply with new policies if they believe that the new policies will merely “come and go.” Instead, teachers believe that they can simply wait to outlast policymakers and the policymakers’ reform efforts.

Likewise, policymakers should recognize that a policy idea rarely enters the classroom unchanged. Therefore, they should expect that schools will tinker with policies for the CCSS when those policies are implemented, especially as teachers figure out how to make it work best for their particular students. In the words of Darling-Hammond (1990), schools “must *adapt* policy rather than [*adopt*] them” (p. 341). Teachers will need time to experiment with the CCSS, and passing mandates to elicit the behavior that policymakers desire to see may extinguish efforts to better serve students under the CCSS. Policymakers should exercise restraint from trying to fix something as soon as they perceive it to not go as planned.

The need for preparation and resources. Moreover, policymakers ought to quickly provide the resources for the professional development to prepare teachers for the CCSS. As this study observed, the vast majority of teachers are not familiar with the CCSS. Only the few NHUSD teachers who have taken their own initiative to research or attend trainings about the new standards have an idea of what the new system entails. Teachers at Oliveira Elementary have heard about the CCSS because of the proactive steps that their administrator took to notify them. Yet, even teachers who are relatively more familiar with the CCSS than most other teachers are unsure of what to expect.

Although the administrator at Oliveira has formally alerted her teaching staff about the CCSS, no administrator in NHUSD has done so. One NHUSD teacher mentioned: “Nobody is really champing at the bit to get started on these things...there has been no institutional push for [teachers] to start learning [about the standards].”

Another stated:

I see no preparation. I think everyone will wait until day one – well, day one minus twenty or the summer before day one, or whenever teachers are given the chance to digest whatever is going on....It’s going to be kind of a last minute thing.

Several teachers added that they and their colleagues will be overwhelmed without sufficient time to be informed, to understand, and to prepare for the new standards. It will be another cause of stress and lowered teacher morale.

Policymakers should quickly provide the professional development to transition to the CCSS not only to passively use the training as a preventative measure against stress and lowered morale, but also to proactively use that training as a means to build support for the CCSS. Some teachers advised policymakers to “get the word out [about the CCSS]” and “emphasize the positives and even acknowledge that it might not be a perfect solution but that it is a better solution.” It is the belief of these teachers that there would be greater support for the CCSS among teachers if policymakers more fully explained what the new standards are and the benefits that those new standards offer.

Nonetheless, there are two noticeable barriers to promptly providing the training. First, it is difficult to quickly and efficiently push training and preparation efforts through the cumbersome education bureaucracy. This is why, despite the two years of

considerable activity at the state and federal levels to implement the CCSS, most local-level schoolteachers and administrators are only now becoming familiar with the CCSS. As indicated by this study, very few of these schoolteachers and administrators have received any notification or experienced any professional development about the new standards. Transitioning to a new system under the CCSS is a massive undertaking; it requires an impeccable coordination that is difficult for any highly-centralized authority, such as the state and federal governments, to execute.

Second, as one survey respondent noted, it is hard to believe that the California government will be able to provide the necessary funds to implement the training because of the state's current budget crisis. Other states are in the same financial predicament, and this is a concern that Rothman (2011) and Kober and Rentner (2011) of the Center on Education Policy have raised. The lack of funding will need to be addressed as implementation of the CCSS proceeds over near future with new curricular materials and testing systems. Many teachers are concerned that these new reform efforts will be derailed and fail to achieve its goals if there is a lack of resources to implement it properly.

Study Limitations

Notwithstanding the results and their implications, there are three considerations that should be made regarding the study's limitations: (a) the lack of teacher familiarity with the CCSS; (b) generalizability over time; and (c) generalizability to other populations.

The lack of teacher familiarity with the CCSS. It is important to point out that the implementation of the CCSS is just underway, so teachers are only now becoming

more familiar with them. Thus, some considerations should be made while interpreting the results of the study.

In particular, a significant number of respondents responded “don’t know” or “neutral” to the survey questions due to their lack of familiarity with the CCSS. So although a large majority of survey respondents may have either agreed or disagreed with a statement, many others remained neutral or did not know what to think. Thus, it is important not to overstate the trends that the adjusted sum uncovered in the survey.

To illustrate this point, consider the survey item which states, “The work that I will put into preparing and transitioning to the Common Core will be worthwhile.” According to the adjusted sum, roughly 45.7% of participants agreed with the statement, whereas only 10.2% disagreed. However, the number of respondents who answered “neutral” is almost as many as those who answered “agree” or “strongly agree,” and the number of respondents who answered “don’t know” was only slightly less than the number who answered “neutral.” Therefore, one ought not to make an exaggerated conclusion that teachers overwhelmingly consider that the work of transitioning to the CCSS is worthwhile because many teachers did not know enough about them to agree or disagree.

That conclusion may very well be true, but the survey result alone is insufficient grounds for justifying it. Rather, the survey result only provides a clue into how teachers might feel. Additional investigative work needs to be done to draw such a conclusion. It is for this reason that the Likert-scale questions were designed to merely obtain a rough idea of what teachers’ perceptions were. The open-ended survey questions and the

interviews were designed to qualify as well as triangulate the rough trends revealed by the Likert-scale questions, ensuring the study would be valid and reliable.

Generalizability over time. The timing of the study not only affects the teachers' familiarity with the CCSS but also raises implications about the study's generalizability. The results may not generalize over time because the teachers' perceptions may change as they learn more about the CCSS and as new policies are developed. Moreover, there are aspects of the CCSS that are currently unknown and will remain so in the near future. For instance, what will the assessment system ultimately entail? Or, how appropriate will the standards be for particular students? Questions such as these will unknown for at least a few years, but when answers to such questions become known, teacher perceptions may shift again. Conclusions of this study must then be re-evaluated when new policy developments materialize and teachers adapt to the new policy environment.

It is worthwhile to note, however, that it is not a foregone conclusion that teacher perceptions will substantially change, especially if the new system under the CCSS turns out to retain much of the standards-based-reform culture under NCLB. Yet, even if substantial change in perceptions were to occur, the findings that this study has uncovered are still significant. There are points for both policymakers to consider as they administer new policies, and current perceptions that this study has documented may help to explain any future perceptions that other studies will find.

Generalizability to Other Populations. Similarly, the findings may not necessarily generalize to all other schools and school districts. NHUSD creates its own particular culture with the policies that it enforces to fulfill NCLB mandates.

Accordingly, NHUSD teachers have their own unique experience with standards-based-reform policies and their own distinct perceptions about the CCSS. The same can be said for Oliveira Elementary as well as any other school and school district.

However, the study utilized a broad sample and, as discussed in chapter 3, employed many steps to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. It is also certainly probable that teachers in other school districts share common experiences with standards-based reform and, as a result, would hold the perceptions about the CCSS that are similar to teachers at NHUSD and Oliveira Elementary. Nevertheless, one should not hastily construe the study's findings to be representative of every school and school district.

Suggestions for Future Research

Only additional research will ascertain whether the study's findings are generalizable to other populations of teachers or over time. For this reason, there is merit to conducting a similar study but with a different sample at a later time. This study took a snapshot of teacher perceptions of the CCSS at a specific time and with a specific sample. Repeating the study with different samples or at different times will result in additional snapshots. Then, juxtaposing each snapshot may yield a rich mosaic of valuable insight for policymakers to consider as they move forward with the CCSS and other education policy. At the very least, studies will need to be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the CCSS as they are implemented over the next few years.

There are additionally other possibilities for research besides simply repeating this study. This study is an inquiry into teacher perceptions of the CCSS but does so at an incipient stage of implementation. Thus, much of what happens under the CCSS remains

to be seen at this time. For instance, how will a new assessment system affect teaching practice? Is it feasible to thoroughly teach all the new standards at an appropriate pace? What will happen to student achievement under the CCSS? How will teacher morale change in the near future? How will the present economic situation affect the funding and implementation of the CCSS? How will teachers shape and modify original policy ideas put forth by CCSS developers? These questions and more are raised by this study and will only be answered by conducting other research.

Indeed, the study simply provided an initial glimpse into how the CCSS may penetrate and takes form in everyday classrooms. Although it has resulted in valuable information, the study is meant to raise more questions and to point out issues about the CCSS that need to be considered while they are still in a relatively early stage of implementation. If this modest study has inspired any further inquiries and conversation about the future of the CCSS and education policy, then conducting it will have been well-worth the effort.

References

- Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., . . ., Mallory, K. (2011). *The condition of education 2011* (NCES 2011-033). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>
- Barton, P.E. (2009). *National education standards: Getting beneath the surface*. Retrieved from Educational Testing Service website: <http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICNATEDSTAND.pdf>
- Byrd-Blake, M., Afolayan, M.O., Hunt, J.W., Fabunmi, M., Pryor, B.W., & Leander, R. (2010). Morale of teachers in high poverty schools: A post-NCLB mixed methods analysis. *Education and Urban Society*, 42, 450-472. doi: 10.1177/0013124510362340
- California Department of Education. (2011a). *Certificated staff by ethnicity for 2010-11: New Haven Unified report* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
- California Department of Education. (2011b). *Certificated staff by ethnicity for 2010-11: Oliveira Elementary report* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
- California Department of Education. (2011c). *Selected District Level Data - 0161242--New Haven Unified for the year 2010-11* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
- California Department of Education. (2011d). *Selected school level data: Oliveira Elementary – Fremont Unified --0161176-6090542 for the year 2010-11* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

Center on Education Policy. (2006). *From the capital to the classroom: Year 4 of the No*

Child Left Behind Act. Retrieved from the Center on Education Policy website:

http://www.cep-dc.org/cfcontent_file.cfm?Attachment=FullReport%5FNCLB4%5F032406%2Epdf

Coburn, C.E. (2004). Beyond decoupling: Rethinking the relationship between the institutional environment and the classroom. *Sociology of Education*, 77, 211-244.

Cooper, H. (2011, March 14). Obama urges education law overhaul. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>

Crocco, M.S., & Costigan, A.T. (2007). The narrowing of curriculum and pedagogy in the age of accountability: Urban leaders speak out. *Urban Education*, 42, 512-535. doi:0.1177/004208590730496

Cronin, J., Dahlin, M., Adkins, D., & Kingsbury, G.G. (2007). *The proficiency illusion*. Retrieved from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute website: http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2007/200710_theproficiencyillusion/Proficiency_Illusion_092707.pdf

Cronin, J., Dahlin, M., Xiang, Y., & McCahon, D. (2009). *The accountability illusion*. Retrieved from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute website: http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2009/200902_accountabilityillusion/2009_AccountabilityIllusion_WholeReport.pdf

Darling-Hammond, L. (1990). Instructional policy into practice: "The power of the bottom over the top." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12, 339-347.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.

- Deniston, R.D., & Gerrity, K.W. (2010). Elementary school teachers' perceptions of No Child Left Behind and its effect on morale. *scholarlypartnershipsedu*, 5(2), 26-34.
Retrieved from <http://opus.ipfw.edu/spe/>
- Dillon, S. (2011, September 22). Obama to waive parts of No Child Left Behind. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com
- Eisen P., Jasinowski, J.J., & Kleinert, R. (2005). *2005 skills gap report: A survey of the American manufacturing workforce*. Retrieved from: http://www.doleta.gov/wired/files/us_mfg_talent_management.pdf
- Finn, C.E., Julian, L. Petrilli, M.J. (2006). *2006 the state of the state standards*. Retrieved from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute website: http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2006/200608_thestateofstatestandards2006/State%20of%20State%20Standards2006FINAL.pdf
- Finn, C.E., Petrilli, M.J., Winkler, A.M. (2009). Foreword. In J. Cronin, M. Dahlin, Y. Xiang, & D. McCahon, *The accountability illusion* (pp. 7-10). Retrieved from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute website: http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2009/200902_accountabilityillusion/2009_AccountabilityIllusion_WholeReport.pdf
- Gewertz, C. (2011, November 4). Common-standards watch: Montana makes 47 [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/11/common-standards_watch_montana.html
- Hamilton, L., Stecher, B., Marsh, J., McCombs, J., Robyn, A., Russell, J., Naftel, S., & Barney, H. (2007). *Standards-based accountability under No Child Left Behind*:

Experience of teachers and administrators in three states. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Hamilton, L. S., Stecher, B. M., & Yuan, K. (2008). *Standard-based reform in the United States: History, research, and future decisions*. Retrieved from the RAND Corporation website: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reprints/2009/RAND_RP1384.pdf

Haycock, K. (2010, July/August). Building college-ready standards. *Change Magazine*, 42(4),14-19. Retrieved from <http://www.changemag.org>

Hess, F.M. (2011, October 5). Straight up conversation: Math scholar Hung-His Wu on the Common Core [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2011/10/straight_up_conversation_berkeley_math_professor_emeritus_hunghsi_wu_on_the_common_core.html

Hess, F.M., & Petrilli, M.J. (2007). *No Child Left Behind primer*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Honig, M.I. (2006). Complexity and policy implementation: Challenges and opportunities for the field. In M.I. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity* (pp. 1-23). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Kendall, J.S. (2011). *Understanding the Common Core State Standards* [Kindle Version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com

Kober , N., & Rentner, D.S. (2011). *Common Core Standards: Progress and challenges in school districts' implementation*. Retrieved from the Center on Education Policy website: http://www.cepdc.org/cfcontent_file.cfm?Attachment=Kober

Rentner %5FCommonCoreDistrict%5FReport%5F091411%2Epdf

kwinters. (2009, June 1). Excerpts from Secretary Arne Duncan's Remarks at the National Press Club [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2009/06/excerpts-from-secretary-arne-duncan's-remarks-at-the-national-press-club/>

McCluskey, N. & Coulson, A.J. (2007). *End it, don't mend it: What to do with No Child Left Behind* (Policy Analysis No. 599). Retrieved from the CATO Institute website: <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/Pa599.pdf>

McCarthy, S.J. (2008). The impact of No Child Left Behind on teachers' writing instruction. *Written Instruction*, 25, 462-505. doi: 10.1177/0741088308322554

McMurrer, J. (2008). *NCLB year 5: Instructional time in elementary schools: A closer look at changes for specific subjects*. Retrieved from Center on Education Policy website: http://www.cepdc.org/cfcontent_file.cfm?Attachment=McMurrer_Report_InstructionalTime_022008.pdf

Mertler, C. (2011). Teachers' perceptions of the influence of No Child Left Behind on classroom practices. *Current Issues in Education*, 13(3). Retrieved from <http://cie.asu.edu/>

Obama, B. (2011, January). *The state of the union*. Speech presented at the chamber of the United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

Orrill, C.H., & Anthony, H.G. (2003). *Implementing reform curriculum: A case of who's in charge*. Retrieved from The K-12 Mathematics Curriculum Center website: <http://www.orrill.com/chandra/barriers.pdf>

- Palmer, D., & Rangel, V.S. (2011). High stakes accountability and policy implementation: Teacher decision making in bilingual classrooms in Texas. *Educational Policy*, 25, 614-647. doi: 10.1177/0895904810374848
- Pederson, P.V. (2007). What is measured is treasured: The impact of No Child Left Behind on nonassessed subjects. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies*, 80(6), 287-291.
- Pedulla, J.J., Abrams, L.M., Madaus, G.F., Russell, M.K., Ramos, M.A., Miao, J. (2003). *Perceived effects of state-mandated testing programs on teaching and learning: Findings of a national survey of teachers*. Retrieved from Boston College website: <http://www.bc.edu/research/nbetpp/statements/nbr2.pdf>
- Petrilli, M. (2010). In A. Schaeffer (Moderator), *National education standards: Hopeful change or hollow promise?*. Policy Forum conducted at the meeting of the CATO Institute, Washington, DC.
- Porter, A.C., Polikoff, M.S., Smithson, J. (2009). Is there a de facto national curriculum? Evidence from state content standards. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31, 234-268. doi: 10.3102/0162373709336465
- Porter, A., McMaken, J., Hwang, J., & Yang, R. (2011). Common Core standards: The new U.S. intended curriculum. *Educational Researcher*, 40(3), 103-116. doi: 10.3102/0013189X11 405038
- Ravitch, D. (1995). *National standards in American education: A citizen's guide*. Washington, DC: Brookings Press.
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- Rothman, R. (2009, December). *Common standards: The time is now*. Retrieved from Alliance for Excellent Education website: <http://www.all4ed.org/files/TheTimeIsNow.pdf>
- Rothman, R. (2011). *Something in common: The Common Core Standards and the next chapter in American education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Smith, J.M., & Kovacs, P.E. (2011). The impact of standards-based reform on teachers: The case of No Child Left Behind. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 17(2), 201-225. doi: 10.1080/13540602.2011.539802
- Spears, P.D., & Loomis S.R. (2009). *Education for human flourishing: A Christian perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Sunderman, G.L., Tracey, C.A., Kim, J., & Orfield, G. (2004). *Listening to teachers: Classroom realities and No Child Left Behind*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard.
- Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering towards utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *Race to the Top program executive summary*. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education website: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *A blueprint for reform: The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act*. Retrieved from the U.S Department of Education website <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2011a). *Bringing flexibility and focus to education law*. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education website: <http://www.white>

house.gov/sites/default/files/fact_sheet_bringing_flexibility_and_focus_to_education_law_0.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2011b). *Mapping state proficiency standards onto the NAEP scales: Variation and change in state standards for reading and mathematics, 2005-2009* (NCES 2011-458). Retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics website: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2011458.pdf>

Valli, L., & Buese, D. (2007). The changing role of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44, 519-558. doi: 10.3102/0002831207306859

Vinovskis, M. (2009). *From A Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind: National educational goals and the creation of federal education policy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Appendix A

Survey Questions

Instructions: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Simply answer based on your current understanding about the Common Core Standards – even if it may not be much – and what you believe about them. However, if you absolutely do not know what to think then, select "Don't know." (Choices: Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know).

- The Common Core will have little impact on my everyday practice.
- I believe that the Common Core will help to raise student achievement.
- The implementation of the Common Core is more of a positive step than a negative step in education reform.
- I believe that the Common Core will be more effective than current standards at preparing students to be college- or career-ready upon high school graduation.
- The work that I will put into preparing and transitioning to the Common Core will be worthwhile.
- I am well-informed regarding what the Common Core Standards are.
- I am sufficiently prepared through professional development to transition from teaching current standards to teaching the Common Core.
- The Common Core will help me become a more effective teacher.
- The Common Core makes me feel more like a professional.
- Especially with the emergence of the Common Core, I feel that I am spending more effort to comply with mandates rather than to teach students to the best of my ability.
- I would encourage others to enter the teaching profession at this time.

- I am concerned that the Common Core will restrict my creativity and the types of instructional strategies that I may use.
- I am concerned that under the Common Core, I will spend too much time preparing students for testing.
- I would like more decision-making power over the curriculum than what I believe the Common Core will permit.
- Transitioning to the Common Core will require new or substantially revised curriculum materials and lesson plans.
- I look unfavorably upon the amount of time students currently spend on taking standardized tests.
- In hindsight, No Child Left Behind was more of a positive step than a negative step for education reform.
- The Common Core will enable me to spend more time teaching higher-level (i.e. critical and creative) thinking skills.
- The Common Core is a welcome change to the status quo.
- The Common Core – as a single, common set of curricular standards – will help to make collaboration and sharing of instructional materials more efficient.
- The Common Core standards are easier to understand than current standards.
- I have a voice in creating and responding to new education-policy legislation, such as the Common Core standards.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. What grade level/content area do you teach? For how long have you been teaching?
2. Tell me what you know about the Common Core State Standards.
3. What are some positive aspects and strengths of the Common Core? What are some aspects of the Common Core that concern you?
4. How do you think the Common Core will affect your everyday instructional practice?
5. Compared with current curricular standards do you think the Common Core will be an improvement, make no difference, or make things worse? Explain.
6. If you could say one thing to an education policymaker regarding the Common Core, what would it be? Do you feel like you have a voice in forming or responding to education policy, such as the Common Core? Why or why not?
7. There is much talk today about teacher professionalism and low teacher morale. Do you see the Common Core having any sort of impact on teacher professionalism or morale?